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# AKIBA

BY

MARCUS LEHMANN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY  
AARON SCHAFER



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Dedicated to

*the memory of  
the late*

Solomon T. H. Hurwitz,  
Ph. D.



Founder of "The Jewish Forum,"  
scholar, man of vision, leader among  
men.

ISAAC ROSENGARTEN, Editor.

## Publishers' Note

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WE ACKNOWLEDGE with gratitude the careful reading of Dr. Schaffer's translation by Dr. Bernard Drachman, through whose painstaking efforts the footnotes were made more complete. Thanks are due also to Rabbi Abraham Burstein and Miss Sadie Genn for correcting the proofs. We feel that this book has been made most readable for young and old, for scholar and layman, and should blazon the path for a series of works much in need by the English reading public.

# PREFACE

BY LEO JUNG.

The author of this book has done pioneer work in more than one field of Jewish endeavor. He has transported the joyous sanctity of Talmud, Midrash and Zohar into the home and hearts of 19th century German-speaking Jewry. Lehmann's Volksbuecherei instructed and inspired. It amused and elevated; it nourished the dream-hungry soul and broadened and sharpened the mind.

Instead of stereotyped platforms and resolutions, the Central European Jew of that period imbibed the messages of our great minds and strong hearts thru a first-hand acquaintance with their lives. He knew from the volumes of Dr. Lehmann's series how the Tannaim lived, and who they really were. The inquisition he saw from the terror of the life of our statesmen, poets, scholars, murdered by its dark powers, or escaped from them by a thousand miracles and heroic acts. He learned both, to appreciate the single-minded devotion of the historical Jew and to foresee the inevitable self-destruction of the dissenter or compromiser. He knew the latter as our affliction all thru history. Thus the reader acquired an attitude of thoughtful evaluation of men and movements.

We have a great store of historical romance, rotting because we are too negligent or too unwise to use it. We cannot hope for a renaissance without a rediscovery of our classic assets. We must therefore learn to labor

in the Jewish libraries, to select the most imposing and enjoyable of our historical texts, put life-giving breath into them and then, in perfectly literary form, place them before the American Jew.

Among the buried treasures of our classic literature are also the innumerable Teshuvoth (Responsa) of our Rabbis, which contain answers to ritual as well as historical, exegetical, homiletical and moral problems. Written all thru the ages of our national existence, they contain the material necessary for the great unwritten "History of Jewish Culture from the Original Texts." Non-Jewish authors, no matter how fair, are insufficiently informed—revealing a curious tendency to conclude the history of our Kultur somewhere about the establishment of the Canon, with apologetic references to the modern scientific, industrial and philanthropic contributions of our people.

Rabbinic literature has been neglected. Even by ourselves. Our youth is offered extracts from the sayings and doings of our Rabbis. We tell the amazed Jew and the incredulous Gentile of Hillel and Gabiahah ben Pesisah; of Beruriah and other good women. All this, being confined to sheer tract wisdom, has a knack of giving a goody-goody impression, which young, active folk do not stomach. We ought to offer them some Eldad ha-Dani, the romance of Benjamin of Tudela, the life of Jewish medieval students from Rabbenu Tam's *Sefer ha-Yashar*. We can well do without the supermiraculosity of the "Sippurim" and other medieval romances.

What baffles me is the curious fact that Israel, the traditional dreamer, is so terribly prosaic and matter of fact in the literature he offers to his youth. Some

time ago a Jewish poet selected some twenty of the lives of Biblical heroes for a poetical, midrashic interpretation, suitable even for tiny children. I recall having been criticized for writing a favorable review of this effort. In the case of prevailing fairy tales, it is necessary to tell our youngsters that these stories are just yarns, untrue and impossible. We, however, instead of filling their young heads with the terrors of witches and ogres, can offer them romance and color together with historic truth.

The psychological interest in folk lore is confined to the student, the professor, and the literary school teacher. But the phenomena of life, past and present, individual or collective, fraught with more mystery and beauty than all the critical genius of our analytical writers will ever be able to destroy. And thus does history offer us lives strange and stirring enough for the most extravagant appetite and the most fastidious taste. Our adolescents need the rousing stuff of strong and beautiful lives, destitute of the blight of commentaries, and presented warmbloodedly and artistically. Not too artificial for life, not too melodramatic for intelligent appreciation. In this form they will fire the imagination, arouse love of good and beauty, strengthen character and brighten the mind.

Attractive, yet constructive literature will satisfy the yearning for romance, through which maturing personalities seek self-expression. It will help our elders to interpret the unrealized dreams of youth. There is an endless array of men and women for our own Institute of Immortals. They represent ideal potencies, great enough to regalanize our youth in America. Jewish periodicals might learn to draw on all that instead of

getting the usual ephemeral wit and ephemeral messages.

"Akiba" represents a fine beginning. It is replete with the paraphernalia of the popular hero—Renunciation, the early trial and the final conquest, the noble tenderness of love and the triumph of the undaunted soldier, the life of uprightness and the crowning of martyrdom. The life of Akiba has its full share of greatness besides the glory of its flaming idealism. Akiba possessed to a high degree the three requisites of true genius: a capacity for readjustment, generous imagination, and unfailing self-discipline. The revered Master of thousands of disciples, who sweeps the floor of a pupil's sick room; the national hero, who bows in adoration of his wife's simple sublimity of heart and mind; the relentless thinker who marries idealism to common sense—he is an embodiment of all we mean when we dream of Jews at the height of Judaism.

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## I.

### THE HERDSMAN

Jerusalem was destroyed, the holy Temple had become a prey to the flames. Unspeakable misery had broken in upon Judah; the blood of the slain and wounded covered the earth; thousands of the noblest and the best had been sold as slaves or were compelled to fight in the arena against wild beasts, offering a horrible spectacle to the blood-thirsty Roman mob. Under the grinding heel of the Roman conqueror, Judah seemed about to be forced to expire. And yet the seed of preservation, of growth, and of everlasting duration, had already been planted, small and insignificant, to be sure, but powerful, and promising life.

Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, the great sage of Israel, had foreseen the downfall of the Holy City. In vain had he advised peace, and submission. The Zealots in the city preferred to endure death and destruction, rather than to bear the yoke of slavery under the Romans. Rabbi Jochanan had the rumor of his death spread abroad; his disciples, Elieser and Joshua, laid him in a coffin, Elieser took hold at one end and Joshua at the other, and thus they carried him in the twilight to the gate of the city.—“It is a corpse,” they said to the watchmen at the gate, “which we wish to bury outside of the city,” and they were permitted to proceed unmolested.

Rabbi Jochanan made his way into the Roman camp, and had himself conducted to the general, Vespasian. “Hail to thee, Roman Emperor!” he addressed the general. “If your greeting is reported to

the Emperor," said Vespasian, "he will have you and me put to death." "But I insist," replied the Rabbi, "that Vespasian is already the Roman Emperor. It will not be long before you will have conquered Jerusalem and the sanctuary of our God, and both of these can be achieved only by the mightiest of men, as the prophet Isaiah has foretold."

And behold, while they were still conversing, mud-covered horsemen came galloping up and exclaimed: "Hail to our Emperor Vespasian! The Emperor is dead, and the people and the Senate have elevated the illustrious general Vespasian to the rank of Emperor!"

The new Emperor was now very gracious to the Rabbi, and granted him the fulfillment of any wish that he might lay before him. Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai asked permission to build an academy in the city of Jabneh, in order to learn and to teach, undisturbed. This modest request was received with favor and Rabbi Jochanan went with his disciples to Jabneh, beginning his educational activity in the very midst of the tumult of war. There he sat as once the high-priest Eli had sat, awaiting future events, for his heart was concerned for the sanctuary of God. And when the frightful news came that Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed and the sanctuary burned to the ground, master and disciples rent their garments, seated themselves on the earth, and wept. Thus they mourned and lamented for a long time, until the master took courage and began to console his disciples.

"It is our duty," he said, "to preserve Israel's future. Even though we have lost all, yet our precious jewel, the Law of our God, is still left us. It is the source of life to us and the security of a better time to come.

Arise, let not our spiritual strength be paralyzed through mourning and grief! Let us preserve for ourselves the source of our life and for our children the heritage of our ancestors."

Thus the master began with his disciples the unpretentious activity which became Israel's firm rock, on which the scattered and persecuted flocks of sheep found protection and safety from the wolves which were harassing them.

Even though Jerusalem and the holy Temple had been destroyed, nevertheless, the curse which to-day rests upon Palestine, the curse that the soil does not yield its fruit and that broad, once productive, stretches of land lie barren, had not yet taken effect. "A landscape of admirable character and beauty," says Josephus, "extends along the lake of Genesareth. Its rich soil is planted with different kinds of trees, and, with its mild climate, which is suitable for the most varied products, rejects no vegetable species whatsoever. Nuts, one of those products which thrive where cool breezes blow, flourish there in countless numbers; here, too, are palm-trees, which grow well in torrid regions; and, in addition to these, there are figs and olives, which are better adapted to a more temperate climate. One might designate this a rivalry of nature, which, almost by violence, has gathered together, in one spot, things which seem to dispute with each other; it is a pleasant combat of the seasons, each of which seeks equally to fit itself to this landscape in preference to any other. Consequently, it not only, contrary to all expectations, produces divers kinds of fruit, but preserves them for a long time. The best of the fruits, at least, the grape and the fig, it yields uninterruptedly for ten months of each year. The

other fruits follow one another alternately throughout the entire twelve months."

In this fertile region, there stood the magnificent home of the wealthy Kalba Sabua, surrounded by fields and vineyards, by date palms and olive groves. The possessor of this house and of all these acres of land had also numerous herds, which were led by his servants to the pasture-lands on the shore of the Jordan. Kalba Sabua had possessed a home in Jerusalem. When Vespasian began the siege of the Holy City, he, Kalba Sabua, had been one of the three men who had supplied the beleaguered city with provisions sufficient for a number of years. But the Zealots had burned the store-houses, in order to incite the besieged to a struggle of life and death.

Kalba Sabua mourned bitterly the fate of the Holy City. By means of a heavy money-ransom, he had escaped the sentence of exile, and had now withdrawn to his country-seat, where he supervised the cultivation of his fields and vineyards. His only daughter, the heiress of his vast possessions, was growing into womanhood. Rachel, like her ancestress of that name, was fair of form and fair of face; but even more beautiful was the noble mind which inspired her, and more priceless than all her father's treasures was the warm heart that beat in her bosom.

At about this time, it happened that Kalba Sabua needed a superintendent, who should take charge of his herds and herdsmen. The wealthy landowner was not equal to the great task of supervising everything, of maintaining order, and protecting himself against theft and embezzlement. No son stood helpfully at his side, and, therefore, he was compelled to take into his house

a stranger, who might put a stop to the treachery which constantly beset him. Many a one had already made application, but none, thus far, had been able to win the confidence of the master of the house. Then, one day, there appeared before him a youth, who brought a letter of recommendation from Kalba Sabua's neighbor, Hyrcanus.

After Kalba Sabua had read the letter, he spoke to the young man standing humbly before him:

"This letter commends your industry, your faithfulness, and your honesty. Even more does your manly figure, which bespeaks strength and skillfulness, recommend you. What is your name?"

"I am called Akiba," answered the youth; "my father was named Joseph and my grandfather Joshua; we are descended from an aristocratic heathen family. Sisera, who was slain by Jael, the general of Jabin, king of Hazor, was the progenitor of our family. My grandfather came to Jerusalem with Queen Helen, and became a proselyte to Judaism. My parents lost their lives and their belongings at the destruction of Jerusalem. And so I am forced to seek a livelihood in the capacity of a servant."

"You speak well," replied the master of the house, "what compensation do you demand?"

At this moment, Rachel entered the room.

"Rachel, my child," the father called out to her, "what is your wish?"

At these words of the master of the house, Akiba turned his face towards the person who was entering. He was amazed at the beauty of the girl, and said in his

heart: "Oh, if I could only answer as once did father Jacob: 'I wish to serve you seven years for your daughter Rachel.' "

Rachel, too, looked with pleasure at the stranger; but quickly she turned to her father and said:

"I desired to inform you, my father, that Papus, the son of Judah, the guest you have been expecting, has arrived."

"Show him to his room, my daughter, and see to it that he is properly served. Also give orders that a lavish meal be prepared in honor of our guest. Take him my greetings, and present him my apologies that I cannot receive him now; I shall go to his room later and there bid him welcome."

Rachel departed.

"He is the son of the friend of my youth," said Kalba Sabua, "designed to become the husband of my daughter, provided the two young persons are pleased with one another. And now, Akiba, enumerate for me the conditions under which you are ready to enter my service."

"What conditions shall I impose upon you, master?" replied Akiba. "Reward my services in accordance with my merits; I have full confidence that you will not fix my remuneration too low."

"You please me," answered Kalba Sabua. "Therefore, I appoint you the supervisor of all my herds and herdsmen. It will be your duty to see that the herdsmen seek the proper pastures, that they steal and embezzle nothing, that the shearing takes place at the proper time, and that the wool is delivered into my warehouses. You

will have to take care of the sale of the cattle which are ready for the market, and select the animals which are to be slaughtered for my household. Are you familiar with the Jewish law?"

"No, master; I know what I have learned of the history of our people only from the stories of others. I have never been called upon to study the teachings of God. Why should I? All the wise scholars were not able to save the Holy City from destruction!"

"Do not speak thus! The scholars were not to blame for the destruction of the Holy City. If you had been a scholar, I should have entrusted to you the duties of slaughtering. But I must forego that. Follow me; I wish to present you to my servants."

## II.

### SHOULD ISRAEL LIVE?

Kalba Sabua had had a rich banquet prepared in honor of his guest, who was to become his son-in-law; several friends from the neighborhood had been invited. Rachel, whose mother was dead, acted as hostess. The conversation soon turned to the great national misfortune.

"What is to become of Judah," said Kalba Sabua with a sigh, "now that the sanctuary of our God lies in ruins? The best and the noblest, the princes and the priests, the leaders of the army and the officials, are slain or sold as slaves. Heart-rending reports come to us regarding the sad fate of our brothers and sisters who have been carried off into foreign lands. Four hundred noble youths and four hundred noble maidens, who were to be taken to Rome, in order to serve the lusts of the Roman debauchees, preferred to seek and to find death in the waves of the sea. The heroes of our people must fight with wild beasts in Rome, in order to afford a bloody spectacle for the inhuman mob. We who have been left behind in Judah are defencelessly exposed to the violence of the Romans. When will the end of our sorrows come?"

"We ourselves," said Papus, "are to blame for all these sorrows."

"So it is," spoke up Hyrcanus, the land-owner who was the nearest neighbor of the master of the house. "God has punished us for our sins."

"Not so," replied Papus. "When I say that we ourselves are to blame for our misfortunes, I mean there-

by that we do wrong to wish to be different from, and better than, all the other nations of the earth. Perhaps the destruction of the Temple is a stroke of good fortune for us, if we now resolve to give up our peculiarities and our distinguishing characteristics. The Jewish state has ceased to exist. We no longer have a king or a high-priest. For that reason, we should make an effort to become completely assimilated with the people of the Roman Empire."

"Do you think," asked Kalba Sabua, "that we should become idolators?"

"Not at all," answered Papus. "I detest the idols of Edom, and I would rather die than throw a stone after Mercury, as their silly idol-worship demands. But there are a thousand other things, with regard to which we can strip off our peculiarities. We must hold firm to the belief in one God, but, otherwise, we must become Romans."

A painful silence ensued; no one understood precisely what Papus meant; and, therefore, no one answered him. Finally, Rachel arose and spoke:

"Permit me, guest of my father, to contradict your words. To be sure, I am only an ignorant girl, for whom, perhaps, it is not proper to express her opinion in the presence of experienced men: I thought that the elderly men would speak; but, as I see that they preserve silence before you, I must, indeed, give voice to my sentiments. What, Papus, do you demand that Israel shall give up its peculiarities in the stream of nations, shall retain nothing but its belief in the unity of God, and, in other ways, become as the people round about? Far be that from us! Israel's future has not been wiped out through the destruction of the sanctuary, nor through the loosening of the bonds of nationality. We are and

remain the nation of God, which He delivered from Egypt, the descendants of His beloved one, Abraham, the children of Isaac, who was willing to give up his life for God, the offspring of Jacob, whom God preferred to Esau. And though Rome has robbed us of everything, it has not been able to take from us the Law of our God. To this we must attach ourselves all the more closely, since the sanctuary lies in ruins, and no sacrificial victim brings atonement for our iniquities. What! We should abandon the eternal life which God has planted in our hearts, we should mingle with the nations round about, should exchange for the sins of the pagans the lofty virtues which God gave us as our heritage? Even though we have brought the downfall of the sanctuary upon ourselves by our wrong-doings, nevertheless, we have not, for that reason, ceased to be the Chosen People of God, and, if we remain true to our Father in Heaven, He will make our future joyous. Did not the Holy Temple fall once before? Things were worse then than now. The powerful Nebuchadnezzar drove our forefathers violently from this land, and the few who were permitted to remain behind had soon after, to flee. Judah lay devastated until God again took mercy upon His people and brought us back. Who were the saviours of Israel? The apostate priests and prophets? No, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Ezra, Nehemiah, and their comrades, those who had remained faithful in their devotion to the sacred teachings. To us, also, future salvation will only be vouchsafed through the most careful fostering of the divine doctrines and the strictest observance of the sacred precepts."

Full of pride and joy, Kalba Sabua looked at his daughter, who was glowing with enthusiasm. But Papus said:

"You, O virgin, wax enthusiastic over the study of the teachings from which your sex excludes you."

"Even if I may not devote myself," replied Rachel, "to the investigation of the oral law, there yet remains for us women the lofty task of gaining for it men and youths and of rearing children for it."

"I fear," said Papus, "that you are going astray in dreams which estrange you from reality. The Roman empire is different from that of Nebuchadnezzar. The Romans have learned from the Greeks, and absorbed into themselves love of the arts and the sciences. Their philosophers reject the worship of idols as whole-heartedly as we do. Plato and Aristotle did not believe in the gods of Olympus. Greek philosophy grants the individual the freedom to do and to believe only what he has recognized as rational. He who has mastered the sublime truths of these great thinkers can find his way aright in all the vicissitudes of life: he alone is free; he will distinguish the external form of things from their inner nature. And so, I, too, wish to see preserved for my people only the kernel of the divine teachings, the belief in the unity of God. For the rest, let each one suit his acts and deeds to circumstances."

"Do you think that the belief in the one God could be maintained and could make us people of God without the Law of God?"

"Rachel is right," interposed the old Hyrcanus. "We Jews must remain Jews; that is in our very blood, and, if once a generation turns away from the divine teachings, the following one returns with all the greater pleasure to the ancient heritage of Israel. I can relate a remarkable example of this. My father, blessed be his memory, was a pious, holy, and learned man. He

was a pupil of the great Hillel. His bitterest sorrow was that I, his only son, did not desire to dedicate myself to the study of the Divine Law. My father had neglected the management of our estates; indeed, he had a mind only for the study of the Law and for the most scrupulous observance of all the religious ordinances; I, on the other hand, had a practical disposition and it pained me that our beautiful estates should bring such scant returns; I devoted myself to husbandry, and spent my time, from early in the morning until late in the evening, in field and forest, in stall and granary. In vain did my father exert himself to spur me on to the study of the Law. Once he was seized with a fit of anger, and he said to me: 'All these temporal goods, to which you are so attached, shall not belong to you; I give all my possessions to the holy Temple.' At that time, there was in my father's service a man from Upper Galilee. The latter had served my father faithfully for three years. On the day of preparation for the fast of the Day of Atonement, he demanded his compensation, in order to return to his family. 'I have no money,' said my father. 'Then give me grain.' 'I have none.' 'Then set aside a field as my recompense.' 'I possess no fields.' 'Then give me cattle from your herds in accordance with my deserts.' 'I have no herds.' 'Then give me furniture or bedding.' 'I have no such belongings.' The man returned to his people, with empty hands and angry heart; he had served three years without remuneration. After the Feast of Tabernacles, my father took a purse of money, had three asses laden with food and drink and all kinds of precious things, and journeyed to Galilee to his former servant; he gave him his recompense and the gifts which he had brought along for him. Then he

asked: 'What did you think of me, when I refused to give you your hire?' 'I thought,' answered the servant, 'that you had no money, that you had not yet removed the tithe from your grain, that your herds and fields were leased; but when you refused me even furniture and bedding, I suspected that you had consecrated all your belongings to the holy Temple.' 'In truth,' said my father, 'you have guessed correctly; I wished, through such a vow, to compel my son, Hyrcanus, to study the Law. But my comrades criticised what I had done and annulled my vow. As you have judged me kindly, so may the Lord of the universe one day prove a merciful Judge to you.' To me, now, the exact opposite occurred; I lived only for the management of my estates, and demanded of my sons that they should devote themselves to husbandry with the same zeal as I. But my son, Eliezer, wished to do nothing but study the Law. He secretly ran away from me, and became one of the most proficient pupils of our great Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai."

"God bless him," said Kalba Sabua, "he is the pride and the hope of orphaned Israel."

"He wanted the whole world to study the Law," said Hyrcanus. "The supervisor of the herds, whom I lately recommended to you, was formerly in my service. When my son visited me a short time ago, he learned to esteem this man's wisdom and his exceptional mental qualities; he wanted to induce him to go to Jabneh with him and to study there. But the man resolutely refused; he hates scholars."

Rachel listened attentively.

"O, if I could hope to succeed," she thought, "in gaining this Akiba for the holy task for which the great Rabbi Eliezer was not able to arouse his enthusiasm?"

### III.

#### AKIBA AND RACHEL

Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai was ill; his disciples, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Channah, Rabbi Jose the Priest, Rabbi Simeon ben Nathaniel, Rabbi Elasar ben Arach, and Rabbi Gamaliel, went to visit their ailing master. When he saw them, he began to weep. His disciples said to him:

"Great master, light of Israel, pillar of the Divine Law, whose mind scatters sparks as does the hammer when it crushes the rock, why art thou weeping?"

And Rabbi Jochanan replied:

"If one were to lead me before a human king, would I not be anxious? And now, ought I not weep, when I am about to appear before the King of Kings, before the Almighty Ruler of the universe, before the Judge who is not to be bribed, before the omniscient God? Who knows on which road I shall be led, whether to the bliss of paradise or into the abyss of Sheol?"

And the disciples said: "Our master, give us thy blessing!"

"May you always," said Rabbi Jochanan, "fear God as you fear men."

"No more?" asked the disciples in astonishment.

"If you are always conscious of the omnipresence of God, you will never do wrong, as, indeed, every human being is ashamed to commit a sin in the presence of his fellow-man."

Our sages have compared Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai with Hezekiah, king of Judah. In the days of that king, destruction broke in upon Israel. The Assyrian imperial power annihilated the kingdom of Israel and led the ten tribes into captivity. Only the faith in God and the piety of King Hezekiah succeeded in saving a small portion of the Israelite nation from submersion in the Assyrian Empire. After the rescue had been effected, Hezekiah sought the preservation of the remnant through the diligent study of the Law. In a like manner, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, too, became the savior of his people. When the national glory of Judah collapsed and the holy Temple sank into ruins, it was Rabbi Jochanan's most earnest concern to maintain the teachings of our God for his people. And now he was dead, the great spiritual hero; now he had fallen, the mighty pillar which had supported the remnant of Israel. All Israel lamented and mourned the great master; it was as though the holy Temple had again been destroyed.

The sad news penetrated also into the country-home of the properous Kalba Sabua; particularly Rachel, the only child of the rich man, was deeply moved by it. She was an inspired daughter of her people. Beautiful and young as the daughter of Laban, whose name she bore, she was under no personal necessity to take the national misfortune so keenly to heart. In the days immediately following the destruction of the Temple, under the Emperors Vespasian and Titus, the Roman yoke did not weigh so heavily upon those who had remained behind in the Holy Land. Rachel could have lived splendidly and joyously, she could have chosen a wealthy youth as her husband, could have journeyed with him to Rome or to Alexandria, where the pleasures

of life offered themselves in fullest measure to the plutocracy, no matter to what nation they belonged. But Rachel loved her people, her religion, her God. Only the future of her nation and the preservation of the Divine Law concerned her. She despised the joys and satisfactions which usually allure young girls, and thought only of what she might contribute towards giving to the future of her people a happier aspect. It need scarcely be mentioned that she positively refused to become the wife of Papus. Her father, too, did not insist on this, after the frivolous point of view of the youth had been revealed to him.

In the meantime Akiba had been able to gain his master's favor to a high degree. The young man possessed the most brilliant intellectual capacities, which he was able to employ in a practical manner for the benefit of his master's household. Under his direction, the herds flourished, and the herdsmen did not dare to neglect their duties. Kalba Sabua became more and more enamored of his servant each day, and extolled his virtues at every opportunity. One thing only displeased him, namely, that Akiba was an avowed enemy of the rabbis and always spoke with the greatest contempt of their activity, which he considered utterly unpractical. When Kalba Sabua and all of his household were weeping and bewailing the death of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, Akiba remained indifferent.

Rachel was not disposed to surrender herself for long to inactive mourning.

"The great master of Israel is dead," she said to herself; "it is a question of gaining for God's holy teachings a man who will some day be in a position to replace the one who has been taken from us."

She went out to the herds, where she hoped to find Akiba. He was sitting on a hill, and was supervising the labors of the servants who were busy with the shearing. When he saw his young mistress approaching, he arose and went to meet her.

"Greetings," he said, "O daughter of my master. Do you wish to be present at the shearing, which this year will considerably augment the riches of your father?"

"I have come," answered Rachel, "in order to talk with you. It has pleased the Almighty to take from our midst our greatest man. All Israel weeps and laments for him; you alone seem not to grieve very deeply!"

"Why should I," replied Akiba, "trouble myself about the death of a man who spent his life in idle researches, and led astray the young men of Israel to devote themselves to the same useless activity! I, I hate these rabbis! They are all full of haughtiness, and exclude themselves from the rest of the people, as though they were made of better dough than the rest of us. One who is ignorant of the Law they scarcely consider a human being. They do not speak with us, because they fear that the saliva in our mouths might moisten them and thus make them unclean; they do not eat or drink with us, because they assert that our food is not clean. O, be silent to me of these rabbis, mistress! They have contributed only towards increasing the quarrels which became the cause of the downfall of our people."

"You speak in this fashion," answered Rachel, "because you do not know the teachings of our God. When the All-gracious Eternal, in the days of old, revealed Himself to His people on Mt. Sinai, He promulgated

the Ten Commandments, in His glory and majesty, amid thunder and lightning; then He gave to the house of Israel the written Law, which Moses transcribed in order that it might become the common property of the entire nation; it lies open for everyone who can search into it. But the written Law receives explanation and significance and practical completion only through the oral Law, which God gave to Moses. Moses taught it to the entire nation; his most proficient scholar was Joshua; from Joshua, the elders received the oral tradition, from them the prophets, from these the sages. They, therefore, are the bearers of the spirit of the Law, they are the soul of the Jewish people. For, what would our people be without the spirit of God which rests upon us, and without the fulfillment of his holy commandments? Behold, God has created all men, to all He is a loving Father, whether they be called Romans or Greeks, Egyptians or Parthians, no matter to what tribe of people they belong, even if they serve idols and live in sin and wrong-doing. But God selected us Israelites from amongst all the nations of the earth, He infused His spirit into us, and sanctified us with His commandments. The Jewish state is dissolved, the house of our God is destroyed by fire, no sacrificial victim any longer atones for our iniquities, and the prophetic spirit has departed from Israel. Only the Law has remained to us, and it will remain with us for ever. That it may be preserved for all coming generations in its purity, sanctity, and perfection, that is the task of the rabbis. Who knows what times we are to meet, to what dangers we shall be exposed! Precautions must, therefore, be taken that the Torah be not forgotten, that Israel be not robbed of its great treasure. When I was still a small child, I often

heard the words of great and pious men, who visited at my father's house in Jerusalem; oftentimes, I heard them speak of the dangers which threaten Israel, and assert that it is necessary to bind the tradition, which goes back in an uninterrupted line to the revelation at Mt. Sinai, so closely to the holy written Word, and to support it thereby that these sacred traditions may never be forgotten. Oh, Akiba, if you would dedicate yourself to this task, you could become a benefactor of your people for all time. God has wonderfully endowed you, has granted you spirit, mental keenness, and great will-power. Leave the herds of my father, and become a shepherd of my people!"

"You have too high an opinion of me, mistress," answered Akiba. "How could I begin to learn now, after having passed the years of my childhood and youth in ignorance?"

"You can do whatever you wish," replied Rachel; "I have often enough observed you, since you entered the house of my father. Great is your industry, inflexible your perseverance, and, in intellectual abilities, you overtower all the men whom I have known. You need only to wish, and you will attain even the seemingly impossible. Go and learn, and you will some day become a great man in Israel!"

"If I should devote myself to study," said Akiba thoughtfully, "I should have to live for it entirely; I should, then, have to give up my lucrative position. What reward do you offer me in its place?"

"Glory and honor and distinction in this world and eternal bliss in the coming world!"

"With all these beautiful things," said Akiba, smiling, "one cannot satisfy one's hunger."

## IV.

### THE PROPOSAL

Although Akiba had rejected the plea of the daughter of his master, yet the earnest words of the young girl did not pass over his head unheeded. They penetrated and kindled his heart, and occupied all his thoughts. A new cycle of ideas was opened up to him, and all the things of daily life and of the activity of his calling, which had hitherto seemed to him of supreme importance, were pushed into the background before the thrilling glimpse into the character of his people which Rachel had granted him. To be sure, he did not neglect his duties, but he was no longer heart and soul in the performance of them. Previously he had lived for the day, with no further care than that of saving a small sum for himself, in order to lease a little estate and to be able to manage it independently. Now this exclusive self-exhaustion in the needs of earthly life seemed to him petty, and no longer proportionate to the powerful intellectual stirrings which he felt within him. On the other hand, he uttered his daily prayers with greater devotion than before, and performed his religious duties with closer attention. Soon it became clear to him that his knowledge was insufficient even for a proper understanding of the commandments and for the careful observance of the sacred precepts. Once, to his very keen annoyance, he had heard of the utterance of one of the rabbis to the effect that the ignorant man cannot be truly pious. He had seen therein a piece of self-

conceit, and had hated the rabbis the more. Now he was beginning to realize that piety must be not only an activity of the sentiments, but also a product of mature thought. Many questions arose in him, which he was not able to answer, and an ardent longing to develop his mind took possession of him.

Rachel, too, was seized with an unrest hitherto foreign to her. The young man whom she was so eagerly striving to win over to the study of the Holy Law had not remained indifferent to her heart. To be sure, she sought to convince herself that it was solely the love for her people which actuated her to the step which she had taken; but when she closed her eyes, there stood before her the tall, noble figure of Akiba. She believed that she was gazing into his flashing eye, reading his thoughts upon his lofty brow; she saw him as he, like a king, issued his commands to the servants of her father.

Behind the house of Kalba Sabua, there was a garden which was watered by one of the many streams which flowed into Lake Gennesareth. One beautiful summer morning, Rachel wandered into the open country, in order to obtain relief for her depressed spirits. She had, at an early age, lost her mother; she possessed neither brother nor sister; among the maid-servants of her father, too, there was no one to whom she could attach herself intimately; her old nurse, who had reared her, had died the previous year; of the friends of her childhood some had perished at the destruction of Jerusalem, others had been sold by the Romans into slavery, or had fled far into the interior. Thus, Rachel had only herself; her father she could not make her confidant. Kalba Sabua had to endure many trials; his spirit had been embittered.

tered, and he was inaccessible to the tender emotions of the heart.

Lost in deep thought, Rachel strode along the bank of the stream, moving further in the direction of its source in the hills. She had long since left behind the garden of her father's house, and she was wandering over jagged rocks, amidst which the stream laboriously wound its way. And so she came to a bench shaded by olive trees, which the servants had prepared for her out of turf; there she sat down and looked at the water, as it foamed over the rocks in a seething cascade.

Suddenly Akiba stood before her.

"Pardon me, mistress," he said, "that I disturb your solitude. But it was you yourself who stirred up questions in me, the answers of which I seek in vain, and, therefore, I should like to ask you to explain to me several riddles the solution of which I cannot find. I have pondered over your words, over all that you said concerning the fate of our people. Pray, tell me why Israel, amongst all the nations of the earth, alone must suffer and endure so much?"

"My friend," replied the girl, "the higher and greater a man's task on earth, the more he has to struggle and to bear. The stupid and simple-minded man, who does not concern himself with matters which, as he says, have no interest for him, generally lives a calm and peaceful life. The ambitious man, who makes an effort to share in the activities of the community, thereby draws down upon his head much hardship and sorrow. Because of the fact that the Almighty has raised Israel so high, that He has chosen it from all the nations of the earth, that He has made it His people, the high-priest of the great family of nations, God has plunged it into incessant

struggle; wherever there is a combat for a lofty prize, Israel must participate. There are only a few peoples who raise themselves above the level of the others and place their foot upon the neck of the nations. The individual generations grow, become great, attain full bloom, and then wither. In each of these efflorescences of nations, Israel has been permitted to share. To be sure, it had to take into the bargain misery and suffering of every description; oftentimes it was hurled to the ground and over its back the ploughman drove long furrows. But God has always raised us again, and has not surrendered us to annihilation. He has never punished us as He punished our persecutors, nor as He overwhelmed our oppressors; even though we must suffer more than other nations, yet God has, at the same time, endowed us with the strength to bear pain, to endure sorrows."

"You resemble a divinely inspired prophetess, mistress! Nothing seems concealed from you. And now, solve for me another enigma, which has ceaselessly occupied my mind for several days. We must believe that God knows everything beforehand. How can we, if God is conscious of all our actions at their very outset, form the free determination to do the good and avoid the evil, how can we be held responsible for our deeds, which spring from necessity and not from our own free will?"

"You ask me that, Akiba, me an ignorant girl? Go forth and learn, and the riddles of the Divine control of the universe will become clear!"

"Does the Torah truly offer such knowledge?"

"Look yonder, Akiba. The stream rushes by. Mighty rocks endeavor to bar its course, but it whirls upon them, is dashed into spray, spurts into the air, and becomes dissolved into countless drops. But the drops

gather together again, and placidly the stream continues its course, until it encounters new obstacles, which it likewise overcomes. Thus it goes inexorably to meet its destiny in the broad bosom of the sea. And now observe the rocks, the huge, imposing cliffs. Already they are polished, pierced, and perforated by the force of the weak drops of water. Our people resembles this stream, when it is filled with the spirit of the divine teachings. The hostile nations, like towering cliffs, oppose it; without swerving, it pursues its path, which Divine Providence marked out for it. The rocks cannot hinder it, they are shattered and perforated by the force of the apparently weak drops of water, as it is written: 'Water hollows the rocks.' "

"Is that truly in the Holy Scriptures?"

"Job, the great sufferer, says these words!"

"Wonderful! Such wisdom is in the Torah?"

"In the Torah which you scorn, to which you ought to dedicate the entire power of your spirit."

"Tell me only one thing, mistress: why did the great misfortune, the destruction of the Holy Temple, the overthrow of the Jewish state, have to break in upon us just in our days? Why must we have to endure all this, why were we not born in an age of happiness and rejoicing, why must we suffer for the sins of our fathers?"

"I can only repeat to you: 'Go forth and learn.' But the fate of our people teaches us that also the unlearned man can understand much of the mysterious ways of Divine Providence. When God, in days of yore, made the covenant with our father Abraham, he warned him even then: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a land which does not belong to them, and they will be

afflicted for four hundred years.' And now, consider, what crime had those men committed who were born, grew up, and died, during the slavery in Egypt, those who never beheld the light of freedom? Yet, they, too, were a necessary link in the chain of events; their children received the Torah at Sinai, their grand-children took possession of the Promised Land. Does not the life of those who were born in slavery appear to us miserable and joyless? They could scarcely rest from their hard labors, their new-born sons were constantly threatened with death. Nevertheless, the all merciful God adorned even the life of these unfortunates with a rich measure of joys. It was the women, the noble, devout women of Israel, who set themselves the task of gratifying their severely-tested husbands. They despised the Egyptian task-masters, and clung with inflexible faithfulness to their enslaved husbands. For them they adorned themselves in their fairest raiment, for them they lived, nor did they lose courage and joyous hope even when the henchmen of the tyrant robbed them of their children, in order to drown them in the Nile. As, in those days, domestic happiness and sincere love between man and wife preserved Israel upright and steeled and strengthened him, so it remained in all periods of distress and danger. In our own day, too, love will awake at our gates and teach us to set fortitude and perseverance against all sufferings."

"If I could find a wife who would stand faithfully and lovingly at my side, I should not be concerned about the need for daily bread. I should devote myself gladly and willingly to the study of the Torah, even though I did not know whence I was to obtain food and drink and

clothing. But this wife would have to be one such as you, mistress ; and I do not dare to raise my eyes to you."

"If I knew that you would one day become a teacher in Israel—I should not reject your suit."

"You set my goal very high."

"I should not reject your suit if you would but promise me to dedicate yourself to the study of the Holy Law, whether or not you attain that goal."

"Rachel, you would——."

He sought to grasp her hand, but she withdrew it.

"Speak to my father," she said and hastened away.

## V.

### THE CHALLENGE

Akiba stood as though paralyzed; a feeling of happiness had overtaken him, such as he had never before experienced. Rachel, the beautiful, noble Rachel, whom, all unconsciously, he had loved from the very first moment that he had perceived her, was willing to become his wife. The aristocratic, wealthy, highly-cultured daughter of his master wished to descend to him, the poor shepherd! Even his dreams had not ventured so lofty a flight; he would have liked to shout so loud for joy that the distant mountains would re-echo the rapture of his soul!

And so he stood there, glancing over the blossoming landscape with transfigured eye. Everything that he saw belonged to the wealthy Kalba Sabua, and it was to become his property, the property of a hitherto needy, impecunious man! In the distance were pasturing the sheep, the oxen, the horses, and the asses, in great number, a princely fortune. And all that was to belong to him in the future! Yet these treasures were but scant and insignificant in comparison with the beautiful, majestic maiden who had selected him, who desired to raise him to her!

But, at this thought, a drop of wormwood fell into his cup of joy. It appeared to him unworthy of himself that he should be indebted solely and alone to his future wife for riches and exalted rank.

"If you were poor," he said to himself, "and I could raise you to me, and could lay at your feet all the goods of this earth, I should feel far happier. Then, too, I should not have the difficult task of asking your father for your hand. How can I dare approach him with such a proposal! He will surely consider it a sign of insanity, that I, his servant, a poor, unlearned shepherd, have the audacity to demand in marriage his only child. He will drive me out of his service and will wish to marry his daughter as speedily as possible to another who will appear worthier to him. And yet it must be done. Help me, all-merciful God, to obtain the hand of my Rachel, and I vow to Thee, with a solemn oath, that my entire future life will be devoted only to Thee, to Thy Service, and to the study of Thy Divine teachings."

Akiba was much too dutiful a servant to neglect the service of his master because of his dream of love. He returned to his labor, and sought to preserve the interests of his master in all directions; no servant, no maid, dared yield to idleness, or even to commit any misdemeanor. Akiba was everywhere, and nothing escaped his attentive eye. The herds flourished under his direction, and his master's wealth increased visibly. Thus the days and weeks passed by. He did not again speak to Rachel, but he was happy when he saw her from afar, when he felt her eye lovingly upon him. He had not yet dared to approach his master and to lay before him the request which must appear to the latter as a stroke of boldness passing all bounds.

One day, Kalba Sabua said to him: "Akiba, I am contented with you; you exert yourself in my service,

and my possessions prosper under your management. But you have not yet told me what reward you demand for your services."

Akiba trembled; at last the moment had come in which he must lay his feelings before his master. He summoned up all his courage and spoke: "Master, you put this question to me once before. Just at that moment your daughter entered, and when I saw her, I thought in my heart: 'If I could but utter the words which our father Jacob spoke, "I wish to serve you seven years for your daughter Rachel!"' Now, O master, I should like to proffer this same request, but in a different form. Release me from your service, that I, in accordance with the wish of your daughter, may devote myself to the study of the Torah; for, under this condition, your daughter has promised to become my wife."

Kalba Sabua believed that he had heard incorrectly; he looked at the young man compassionately and said:

"I do not understand you, Akiba. Did, perhaps, a demon appear to you in the form of my daughter, and mirror before you things which do not at all belong to the realm of possibility?"

"I understand very well," answered Akiba, "that what I say must seem to you an unjustifiable audacity, and I should not have ventured to approach you with such a request, had Rachel not demanded it."

Kalba Sabua opened the door of the chamber, and bade a servant summon his daughter.

It was not long before Rachel appeared. With firm step she approached her father, grasped his hand, kissed it, and said:

"You have summoned me, father?"

"My beloved child," said Kalba Sabua, "you have always been to me an obedient and loving daughter; I have never needed commands and prohibitions with you; my wishes have always been yours. When Papus appeared and wished to sue for your hand, he pleased neither you nor me, and I sent him away without even first asking you; for I knew that you would never have wished to become his wife."

"I know it, my father," answered Rachel. "You have always been so kind and loving to me that it has been a joy to me to obey you."

"For that reason, I cannot believe, my child, the words of this man; he asserts that you challenged him to sue for your hand with me. I do not wish to speak of the fact that he is poor and of heathen descent; but he is an ignoramus, and you, my daughter, always had the desire to become the wife of a man who has drunk from the living springs of the Divine teachings."

"Hear me, my father! The spirit of this man is an unusual one. Akiba has promised me to consecrate all his days and nights to the study of sacred lore. With his intelligent gifts, he will surpass the great men of Israel and will become of the foremost of them. To gain him for the sublime task of our people, I betrothed myself to him."

"Foolish child," said Kalba Sabua, "will the man be able to make up what the boy neglected to learn? And even if he does, do you think that he would fulfill his promise? 'Under three things,' says the wise King Solomon, 'does the earth tremble, and one is under the servant who becomes a master.' This man strives to win you for the sake of your wealth, and once he is rich, he will only wish to enjoy your possessions."

"You judge me falsely," said Akiba with modest demeanor. "I love your noble daughter, and should esteem myself fortunate, if she were as needy as I."

"If she were needy," replied Kalba Sabua, "would you not have to work hard, in order to support your wife and the children who would be born to you? Would you then have time to busy yourself with the Torah?"

"If I were poor," answered Rachel, in place of him to whom the question had been put, "I should toil with my hands in order to support my family while my husband devoted himself, without disturbance, to his sacred calling."

"You speak thus, thoughtless child," responded Kalba Sabua, "because you do not know poverty and the torment and anxiety of poverty. You have never experienced what it means to be hungry and to lack the nourishment necessary to still gnawing hunger."

"Though I have never experienced it, my father, I do not fear it. If I could succeed in contributing to the rescue and preservation of my sorely threatened people, I should be satisfied to eat nothing but dry bread and to sleep on the bare floor. You, too, my father, love our holy people ardently. You sacrificed a large part of your fortune in order to provide besieged Jerusalem with food. Your provisions were destroyed by fire. But I should like to save for my people its sacred treasures, which no fire can devour, which are, themselves, a heavenly fire, shedding warmth and light through thousands of years. It did not take me long to appreciate the spirit of your servant. His understanding is powerful and penetrating, capable of fathoming the depths of the Divine Law and of taking into himself its entire vast realm. He will be a blessing to our people, as no other man on earth;

he will become the teacher of our people and will bring to realization the promise: 'All Thy sons will be scholars of the Lord, and the fulness of peace will be bestowed upon Thy children.' ”

Rachel had spoken as an inspired seer, and Akiba's eyes, overflowing with blissful rapture, were fixed on her. Yes, he felt sure, for the sake of this girl he was able to strive for and to attain the summit. But Kalba Sabua said:

“I do not comprehend your enthusiasm, which borders on raving. How can you, foolish child, foretell that this ignorant fellow will one day become a great teacher? Therefore, it is my duty to think and to decide for you. You, Akiba, will leave my house this very day, and you, Rachel, will renounce completely the idea of becoming this man's wife. I shall journey to Jabneh, and seek a son-in-law for myself among the pupils of the great Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai.”

“O my father,” exclaimed Rachel, stretching out her hands in supplication, “I have given this man my word, and I shall keep it: Never will I become the wife of another.”

Kalba Sabua knew his daughter, and realized that she was speaking the truth; consequently anger overpowered him, and he burst out:

“Then know that if you do not comply with my wishes, you have ceased to be my daughter. If you throw yourself upon the neck of this beggar, then you, too, shall learn how bitter the cup of poverty tastes. Hear me and pay attention to my vow: no penny will you receive of all that is mine. You will be permitted to take nothing with you from my house but the clothes

which you are wearing. You may go to beg with the paupers and to ask alms at the gates of compassionate people. Now choose between him and me."

"My father," said Rachel anxiously, "God is my witness that I am deeply sorry to have excited your indignation. I forfeit lightly your riches; I should not like to dispense with your paternal love."

"You hold to your determination?"

"I cannot do otherwise."

"Then go with this man: you are no longer my daughter: you have forfeited my love; it is sufficient that I do not utter a curse and heap maledictions upon your stubborn head."

## VI.

### THE SACRIFICE

In the little city of Gimso in the neighborhood of Lydda, there lived and taught one of the most prominent sages of Israel; his name was Nachum, Nachum of Gimso, or, as it was later pronounced, Gamzu, for Nachum's motto, in everything that happened to him, was "Gam zu le-toba!" that is, "This also is for the best!" Nachum had the unshakable confidence that everything which Almighty God sends to man is for his best, however evil it may appear to us.

Nachum had just concluded his lecture and dismissed his pupils, when a poorly clad young woman entered. "Pardon me, Rabbi," she said, "that I dare to appear before you; but my husband is not yet accustomed to intercourse with the sages; therefore, I come to ask you to receive him into the circle of your disciples."

"You seem familiar to me, my daughter," answered the Rabbi. "What is your name?"

"I am called Rachel; Kalba Sabua is my father." Nachum started back in amazement.

"What!" he cried, "has your father lost his fortune?"

"By no means," responded Rachel, "my father is still in possession of his riches, but he has banished me."

"Unfortunate woman, what crime have you committed?"

"I have chosen as my husband one of his servants, under the condition that he dedicate himself to the study of the Torah. This, my choice, did not meet with the approval of my father, and he drove me from his house. My husband will fulfill the promise that he gave to me, and for this reason I have come, Rabbi, to ask you to show him the paths which lead to the sanctuary of the Divine teachings."

"Wherewith do you expect to live and to obtain the most urgent necessities, if your father closes tight his hand and your husband devotes himself to study?"

"I sold," replied Rachel, "the costly garments and ornaments which I was wearing when I left my father's house. With that, we have acquired a little hut and a meagre supply of furnishings. From now on I shall support myself and my husband by the toil of my hands."

Full of admiration, Nachum gazed at the beautiful young woman who had been reared in wealth and luxury.

"You are a heroine, my daughter," he said, "and deserve that your husband should some day become a great teacher in Israel. Your spirit of sacrifice will be lauded even after thousands of years, and you will serve as a model and a pattern to all the daughters of Israel. Bring your husband to me, and I shall see what I can do for him."

Rachel departed and soon returned with Akiba. "What have you already learned?" the Rabbi asked him.

"I have learned," answered Akiba, "to cultivate fields, to attend to vineyards, to take care of orchards, to watch the herds, and to do everything that husbandry demands. But scholarly knowledge has remained foreign to me. I can neither read nor write."

"This, too, is for the best," replied the Rabbi. "To be sure, it will be difficult for you to follow my discourses, which are based upon the Holy Scriptures. First of all, you must learn to read and write. I shall keep you here now and teach you the letters at once."

"Many thanks, Rabbi," said Rachel. "Praised be God that my husband has found so amiable and kindly a master. But I must go home and be industrious."

And she went; arrived at her wretched hut, she seated herself at the spinning wheel and spun with undisturbed diligence in order to gain means of subsistence for the coming day.

When twilight began to fall, she set the table and kindled the lamp. The door opened, and Akiba entered.

"Greetings, life of my life!" he called to her. She hastened to meet him, and embraced and kissed him. Then they washed their hands, and sat down to their scant meal.

"Well, my beloved husband," said Rachel after Akiba had appeased his hunger, "have you already learned something?"

"I have learned to read and write the letters of the alphabet," answered Akiba. "That is a teacher with whom it is a joy to learn; he also taught me the numerical value of the letters, and answered every one of my rather foolish questions with the greatest love and friendliness. When I had mastered the alphabet, I was permitted to read in the Holy Scriptures. 'My son,' said the Rabbi, 'if anything should appear striking to you, ask without hesitation.' And immediately I asked him, 'Why does the Torah begin with Beth? The Beth has only a small numerical value! The Torah should begin with the Taw; that has the highest value of all

the letters, and the word Torah begins with it! Then said the Rabbi: 'Your question is a just one, my son. Hear what reply the sages make to it. The twenty-two letters of the alphabet contain all wisdom, and the whole Torah is compiled from them. God formed them in script of fire, and when God was about to create the world, they surrounded His holy throne, and each letter implored the Almighty that it should be chosen as the first in the creation of the universe and in the writing down of the Torah. First the Taw stepped forward and said: 'To me belongs the precedence, because I have the highest numerical value and because the word Torah begins with me.' But God rejected the Taw, because it was destined, in the days of the prophet Ezekiel, to be branded as a stigma upon the sinful man who had been sentenced to death. The Shin stepped forward, and it, too, was rejected because the word '*Sheker*', 'Falsehood,' begins with it. Then the Resh demanded the preference, but it was refused because it means '*Ra*,' 'Evil'; and so they all came, and were turned aside, until the Beth approached and said: 'Almighty God, may it be Thy will to create the world with me; for I am the first letter of the sentence: "Blessed be God forever."' And God answered: 'Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord!' And God honored the request of the Beth, and created the universe with it, as it is said: '*Bereshith bara Elohim*.' Mournfully the Aleph had withdrawn; it had not been given an opportunity to utter its wish. Then the Holy One, Blessed be He, called to Him, and said: 'Aleph, why are you silent?' And the Aleph replied: 'How can I venture to speak, since I am only one, and all the other letters have a higher value than I?' And God said: 'Fear not; you shall be

the first among them all and, like a king, shall take precedence over them. You are one; I too am One, and the Torah is one, and when I shall reveal myself to my people on Mount Sinai, I shall begin the revelation with you in these words: "*Anochi*"—"I am the Lord, thy God."

Rachel listened to her husband in astonishment. When at last he became silent, she sprang up, embraced him warmly, and said:

"My beloved husband, I was not deceived in you. You will bring to realization all the high and beautiful hopes which I have placed in you. You will one day be a revered teacher in Israel."

Akiba now journeyed daily to Gimso, in order to enjoy the instruction of his wise master. Nachum soon became very fond of the eager scholar, and sought in every way possible to facilitate the study of the Divine teachings. It was a large circle of young men which had assembled about Nachum. Akiba was the eldest and most ignorant of them; the youngest of all was named Ishmael. He was descended from an aristocratic priestly family, and had been a very small child when the Holy Temple was destroyed. The boy was distinguished for remarkable beauty; for this reason, he was taken prisoner by the enemies, and sent to Rome. In the capital of the conqueror, he was thrown into prison. One day, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah came to Rome, and his path led him past the prison. He saw the handsome Jewish boy whose eye looked so sad and whose face was framed by gleaming black locks. Rabbi Joshua exclaimed aloud in Hebrew: "Who hath given Jacob for plundering and Israel as a prey to robbers?" And immediately the captive boy replied: "Is it not God, against whom we have

sinned? For they did not wish to walk in his ways nor to hearken to his teachings." "In sooth," said Rabbi Joshua, "this boy will some day be a great man. I shall not rest until I have released him for all the money that may be demanded for him." And he did as he had spoken. To be sure, the Romans were very unwilling to give up the handsome boy, and an exorbitant sum was demanded for him. But Rabbi Joshua did not rest until he had collected the money amongst his friends in Rome. Then he set free the gracious youth and took him along to Judea. Here he entrusted him to the guardianship of Nachum of Gimso, who instructed him in the Torah. Now Ishmael had become a young man, the constant boast of his teacher. To him, the much younger of the two, Akiba attached himself, and a close bond of friendship united the pair for the remainder of their lives.

While Akiba studied with ceaseless diligence, Rachel labored no less industriously to procure the bare subsistence with which she and her husband contented themselves. In vain had she endeavored to conciliate her father; the latter remained stern and inexorable, and so Rachel, reared in the lap of prosperity, was compelled not only to toil vigorously, but even sometimes to deny herself the most necessary articles, for it was a question not only of gaining the needs of life but also of accumulating some savings for the period, soon to come, when she looked forward to a joyful event. Her courage and her activity succeeded here as well. Already she had saved a modest little sum, when an incident occurred which robbed her of it.

## VII.

### IN POVERTY

The little village in which the clay hut of Akiba stood was called Korchah; for that reason, probably, and not, as others think, because, in later years, he became bald, did his friends call him "Koreach" (for that reason, too, his son was called "Ben Korchah").

It was a low, wretched hut which Akiba and his wife inhabited, composed of only two rooms, one of which served as a living room and a bed-chamber, whilst the other was used by Rachel as the kitchen and by Akiba as a study. The young husband and wife possessed not even a bed; they slept upon straw, and when, in the morning, Rachel removed the loose blades from her hair, it grieved Akiba that she who had been reared in wealth and abundance must be subjected to such privation. But there were still needier people. In Korchah, there lived a man named Elijah. He had broken a limb at his work, and had been lying for weeks on the sick-bed; everything that he owned had already been sold; then, to fill up the measure of misery, his wife was delivered of a male child. So the two, husband and wife, lay there, sick and helpless. Once, when Akiba, towards evening, was returning home from Gimso, he heard the weeping and wailing of Elijah in the hut. He entered and looked the misery full in the face. Saddened he went home.

"Ah," he said to his wife, "if I had money, how well I could use it now."

And he recounted the need and suffering which reigned in the hut of Elijah. Then Rachel drew from her garment a purse containing a number of silver coins and handed it to her husband.

"Behold here," she said, "what I have saved from the toil of my hands for the time which will soon approach, and during which I shall not be able to labor. Take this money and carry it to the hut of the wretched Elijah. God will help us in some other way."

"My noble wife," said Akiba, "not only have you made the very greatest sacrifice, in order to gain me for the study of the Torah, not only do you, the daughter of the wealthy Kalba Sabua, impose renunciations upon yourself, but you also rob yourself of your hoard of pennies, in order to alleviate the pain of others. Your trust in God is as great as your love for the Torah, and your compassion for the suffering of others makes you forget your own distress! Oh, I am rich to possess such a wife; I do not envy the Roman Emperor his treasures! But if God should ever bestow upon me money and property, you shall walk abroad adorned as a princess, and, in memory of this hour, a golden diadem shall ornament your brow, a diadem into which the most cunning artificer shall engrave the image of the holy city of Jerusalem."

"Enthusiast!" answered Rachel, smiling. "Now go and bring the eagerly-awaited assistance to the suffering pair."

Akiba went. With winged feet he hastened to the hut of the poverty-stricken Elijah, and brought him Rachel's savings. Then he requested a neighbor to make the necessary purchases and to provide the unfortunates with food and drink and whatever else they might need.

The inhabitants of Korchah were poor, and could help neither with money nor with food, but they were ready to render service, and, now that funds were to be had, they willingly undertook to procure all that was lacking.

It was a joy to see how refreshed the wretched, starving people were, how they both brightened up under the attention of their self-appointed nurses. They greeted Akiba as their rescuing angel. But he waived aside their gratitude.

"Not to me are you indebted," he said, "but to the noble woman whom I am so fortunate to call my wife. She earned the money with her own hands, and saved it up, penny by penny. It is, to be sure, only a little; but it will suffice for the next few days, and God will help thereafter."

On the next day, Akiba approached his teacher, and asked him for permission to remain absent from the house of instruction for several hours of the day.

"Hitherto," he said, "my wife has supported me, and procured the household expenses, so that I might devote myself, undisturbed, to study. But now she will not be able to work for some time. And so I must set my mind to earning as much as we need. But I shall not on that account pursue my studies any the less eagerly; and I shall make use of a large part of the night."

"Allow me," replied Nachum, "to assist you from my belongings: I am well-to-do, and it is easy for me to provide you with enough to support yourself and your family."

"Far be it from me," responded Akiba, "to accept gifts, as long as my arm is strong enough to earn my daily bread; I should thereby only be robbing others, who are poor and sick and unable to care for themselves.

Rabbi, there is in my village a needy man, Elijah by name: he has been lying for weeks on the sick-bed, for he has a broken limb; and yesterday his wife gave birth to a boy. If you will look after these wretched persons, Rabbi, you will be a savior to them in the time of their greatest want. These people are in pressing need of aid, not I."

"You are a noble soul, Akiba," said Nachum, and extended his hand to his pupil. "May God bless you. When such men as you dedicate themselves to the study of the Torah, Israel is not orphaned. Go in peace, and gain, through the toil of your hands, the needs of your household."

"My reverend master," answered Akiba, "your blessing is worth more to me than thousands of pounds of gold and silver."

Akiba returned home, and asked Rachel to cease her toil and to spare herself, as her condition demanded. Then he went into the forest and gathered kindling wood, which he split into small pieces, tied together into bundles, and sold on the market place at Gimso. A part of the earnings he kept for himself. The wood was to serve him as a torch, by the light of which he might devote a portion of the night to study. And so he sat in the kitchen upon a foot-stool, holding in one hand a burning pine torch, in the other a scroll of the law. He had already progressed so far as to be able to read in the Torah without the points which serve as vowels. And he commenced to read: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

He meditated upon what he read, considered every letter, and asked himself for what purpose the Holy Scriptures employed precisely this letter, this word, this

mode of expression. And he answered all his own questions. Then the observation occurred to him that the definite article, "the," was superfluous in this first sentence, in both instances; it might just as correctly have read: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Long did he ruminate on this, and he was so lost in thought that he did not notice that the little piece of kindling wood had burned down until the fire reached his hand and the wound pained him. He then extinguished the flame and rolled up the scroll, saying: "I can ponder also in the dark, and, in this way, can save fire." Thus he sat in the dark room, thinking and searching. But at last he perceived the cold was overpowering him. Consequently, he again kindled a piece of wood, saying: "Beloved torch, you not only grant me food and drink, you not only furnish me with light whereby to study, but you also keep warm my body and restrain me from falling asleep; for, if I should fall asleep, the beneficent fire might become harmful to me."

And he pondered anew the question which he had asked himself. Finally he believed he had found the answer.

"If," he said, "the Holy Scriptures had written: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth,' people might have been mistaken, and might have thought that heaven and earth were also deities and had achieved the work of creation in company with God. But since the Torah adds the article, everyone sees that heaven and earth are not creators, but the created."

Rejoiced by the solution upon which he had hit, Akiba sought his bed in order to gain strength, through a few hours' sleep, for the labor of the next day.

As the first day of toil had provided Akiba the means of subsistence for a short time, he concluded, for the present, to gather no kindling-wood and again to study the Law exclusively. He was anxious, too, to find out whether his teacher would recognize his solution of the question as the correct one. When he came to Gimso, he found his friend Ishmael, whom he informed of the results of his meditations. The latter shook his head and said:

“Friend Akiba, you have not busied yourself with the word of God as you should. Such an error as you suppose, if the Torah had omitted the article, would not be possible; for, then, it would have to read: ‘In the beginning God, heaven and earth created’ (plural). Your question is a proper one, and the Torah, to be sure, wishes to indicate something to us through the apparently superfluous articles. When God created the world, He raised the universe in its totality by means of His creative word, and, in the six days of creation, only developed what had already been constructed. Therefore, the article prefixed to the word ‘heavens’ indicated that God created, simultaneously with the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars; at God’s bidding these came into being, from the point of view of matter, at the very outset, and were developed and shown their proper positions only on the fourth day: the same we are taught by the article prefixed to the word ‘earth.’ Trees, plants, and the Garden of Eden received tangible form in the very beginning, but sprouted, at God’s behest, only on the third day. I shall prove to you that this is so. In another passage, we read: ‘This is the account of the creation of heaven and earth, which were created on the day when the Lord Eternal formed heaven and earth.’

At the creation, the heavens were the first; in the development, however, the earth came first; for the plants blossomed forth on the third day of creation, whilst the sun, moon, and stars did not receive their positions until the following day."

"I thank you, brother Ishmael," said Akiba; "the next time I shall exert myself to think more correctly and to investigate with more diligence."

When Akiba returned home that evening, there had been born to him a son, to whom he gave the name of Joshua.

## VIII.

### THE STORM AT SEA

Years sped by. Akiba displayed an industry and a zeal for learning which amazed all those who had the opportunity of observing him. And when Nachum laid before his pupils the words of Jose ben Joezer, "Drink diligently the words of the wise," he set up Akiba as a paragon. The latter strove to learn everything that was to be learned. When he was in the company of a physician, he had himself instructed in medicine and enlightened concerning the structure of the human body. With the intention of learning, he visited mathematicians, astronomers, and rhetoricians; he had artisans show him the expert tricks of their trade, realizing well that everything deserving to be known would stand him in good stead in the study of the sacred lore.

The years rolled on. Vespasian died; his elder son, Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem and the destroyer of the holy Temple, became the absolute ruler of the powerful Roman Empire. The reign of Titus lasted only two years. During this brief period, severe strokes of misfortune overtook Rome. The capital of the Roman Empire was visited by a terrible conflagration, which raged unrestrained for three days and ruined a large part of the city. Then a frightful pestilence broke out, during which each day, for a long time, ten thousand people perished; even more terrifying was the great eruption of Vesuvius, which devastated the cities of Campania. Everywhere people saw in these horrible blows of for-

tune punishment which was being dealt to the destroyers of the Temple. Titus himself, during the entire time of his short reign, was ailing. In Judea, there was current a remarkable story concerning the peculiar illness of the great Emperor. When Titus, it was told, had finished the Judean war, and wished to return to Rome by way of the sea, a terrible storm arose, threatening to dash the Emperor's ship to pieces. Titus stood on the deck and gazed, with gloomy eye, into the seething, raging sea. As the storm grew more and more violent and the mast tumbled down with a crash, the destroyer of the Holy Temple exclaimed: "Thou, God of the Jews, as Thou art now treating me, so didst Thou once treat Pharaoh and didst drown him and his army in the waves; it seems that Thou hast dominion only over the waters. But on land, I am mightier than Thou, for I destroyed Thy city and set fire to Thy Temple." Thus cried out the wanton Caesar, and suddenly the storm was appeased, and the skilful crew succeeded in reaching the shore. But when Titus disembarked at Brundisium, the Almighty sent the tiniest of his creatures to punish the ruler of the great Roman Empire. A wasp flew up, crawled into one of the nostrils of the Caesar and intrenched itself there. The wasp grew larger and larger, always gnawing and beating at the brain of the tormented man, so that Titus never again experienced an hour of peace. Once he went by a smithy, while a heavy hammer was falling with a loud crash, upon the anvil. At this, the wasp became frightened and ceased gnawing and beating. When Titus observed this, he commanded that an anvil continually be struck by a hammer in his presence. But, after thirty days, the insect became accustomed to the noise, and began anew his work of destruction. And so

Titus, racked by the most terrible pains, dragged out his days, until, after a reign of two years, he died at the age of forty. When, after his death, his body was cut up, there was found in his head a winged insect of the weight of two gold coins.

When Titus died, the supreme power devolved upon his brother, Domitian, who was ten years his junior. The Jews resolved to send a deputation to Rome, in order to congratulate the new Emperor upon his accession to the throne, and to bestow lavish gifts upon him. A collection was made for this purpose throughout all Judea, and a large sum was gathered together, which was converted into gold and diamonds. These were placed in a skillfully wrought, richly adorned jewel-case. But who should be the bearer of the gift? The youthful Rabban Gamaliel, the scion of the royal family of Hillel, had been chosen Prince; but he was still too young to be entrusted with so weighty a mission. The choice fell upon Nachum, the oldest of the contemporary sages in Israel. Nachum willingly and joyously accepted the important errand. When he took leave of his pupils, Akiba was deeply grieved.

"My esteemed master," he said, "must I now dispense with your instruction for nine long months?"

"Accompany me," answered the Rabbi; "then we shall be able even on the journey to study the Torah together. In addition, there will be much to learn in the capital of the world for one so diligent in the pursuit of knowledge as you."

Akiba, highly elated, accepted this proposal of his teacher, and took leave of his wife and children—in the meantime two more children, a boy named Simeon and a girl called Shulamith, had been born to him. Akiba

joined the deputation which, in addition to Nachum, was made up of two other aristocratic Jews, Nicodemus and Abuyah.

In Jaffa, the travelers set sail on the ship that was to transport them across the Mediterranean Sea to the coasts of Italy. Here, too, Akiba sought to appease his hunger for knowledge. Soon he knew the ship from top to bottom, could name every one of its parts, and learned from both oarsmen and pilot their special craft. He had his teacher speak to him of the wonders of the sea and of the manifold plants and animals which grow, live, and thrive therein.

"For everything that exists on dry land," said Nachum, "there is something similar in the bosom of the sea; a sea-dog, a sea-lion, a sea-bear, a sea-cat, a sea-mouse, a sea-horse, and all the rest; the weasel alone is to be found only on dry land, no creature resembling it lives in the depths of the sea; for that reason, the dry land is also called "Cheled," which is related to "Chuldah" (weasel).

"Truly," replied Akiba, "now, for the first time, I understand the words of the psalmist: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business on many waters, they see the works of the Eternal and His marvels in the deep'."

And lo! it was as though, through his words, he had conjured up the continuation of the psalm. A fearful storm arose, and the waves mounted high; they ascended to the very skies, they descended far into the abyss; the souls of the voyagers despaired; the travelers staggered about like drunken men and sought refuge in the hold of the ship. Only Akiba remained on deck, in order to help the crew. But the latter were trembling because

of the fury of the tempest, and all their wisdom was at an end.

"We must die," said the ship's captain with quivering lips.

The oarsmen had dropped the oars, the pilot no longer attempted to steer the ship. Horror was painted on the faces of all the sailors. An aristocratic Roman, who was on board with his wife, had conducted her into the hold, and had now come up again. He heard the words of the ship's captain and terror seized upon him. Then Akiba began to speak, and his voice drowned out the tumult of the storm and the waves:

"My brothers," said he, "do not despair! The Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who set the tempest into motion, will also bid it again be silent. In the hold is my teacher, a pious, holy man, who is about to carry out a mission for the welfare of his people. He will not drown in the sea, and for his sake, we, too, shall be saved. Let us pray to the Lord of the universe, that he bid the storm and the waves of the sea be silent."

Thus spoke Akiba; then, raising his hand towards Heaven, he exclaimed:

"Lord of the universe, Creator of heaven, earth, and the sea, sole God, all-merciful Father, have mercy on us!"

All joined in the prayer of Akiba,—the ship's captain and his crew, the pilot and the oarsmen, and even the aristocratic Roman. Soon the storm abated and the waves began to grow calm again. Joyfully the ship's crew returned to its tasks; but the Roman said to Akiba:

“Praised be the God of Israel, who has heard your prayer. My name is Flavius Clemens; I am closely related to the Emperor; if you should need an intercessor at Rome, I shall be more than ready to serve you.”

Several days later, the ship entered the harbor of Brundisium; but the Jewish travelers had been attacked by seasickness, which did not leave them until they had set foot on shore. With tottering steps, they were led into the city, where, in an inn, they awaited the end of their severe illness.

## IX.

### THE GIFT TO THE EMPEROR

While the members of the Jewish deputation lay sick on their couches and not in complete command of their senses, the wife of the inn-keeper inspected the baggage of the guests and, to her surprise, found the beautiful, skillfully worked jewel-casket which contained the gift of homage for the new Emperor. She took it and brought it to her husband. The latter opened the case and greedily examined its contents.

"Now we are wealthy," he said to his wife, "I shall take out the treasure and bury it in my garden."

"And the casket?" asked his wife, "the exquisite case? Shall we not keep that, too?"

"By no means," replied the man, "many people know that this casket came into our house with the strangers. That would make us guilty of high treason. I shall fill it with earth, lock it, and put it back again."

This was done. When the travelers again felt strong enough to resume their journey, Nachum opened the casket. It was filled with earth; the gold and the diamonds had disappeared. Deep dismay seized the members of the Jewish delegation; but Nachum said: "That, too, is for the best."

Nikodemus, Abuyah and Akiba were for hastening to the praetor and having the inn-keeper and his wife imprisoned. Nachum, however, said:

"How can that help us? The people will assert that they know nothing about it. They have probably con-

cealed the treasure in such a way that it will be impossible to find it. We are strangers in a strange land, and will seek justice here in vain. Let us make our way without delay to Rome and let us give over the casket with the contents which it now, through God's disposition, contains. The all-merciful God will bring matters to their proper conclusion."

"Let us," said Nikodemus, "return to Judea and gather new gifts."

"Who tells you," answered Nachum, "that our second journey will prove more successful than the first? Does not the same danger threaten us? God, who rescued us from the waves of the sea, will cause the purpose of our trip to prosper."

No one dared to offer further opposition, and they set out on the journey.

After a few days, they arrived in the vicinity of the great world-capital. Even at a distance they heard the uproar of the tumultuous populace.

"Only through Israel's sin," said Nachum to Akiba, "has Edom waxed powerful. Originally, lower Italy was an island surrounded by seas. On the day on which Solomon married the daughter of the Egyptian king, the angel Michael descended from Heaven and plunged a reed into the sea. About this, mud accumulated, and so, gradually, there appeared the 'terra firma' which unites lower to upper Italy. When Jeroboam set up the two golden calves, one in Dan and one in Beersheba, and said: 'These are your Gods, O Israel, who led you out of Egypt,' the twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, the founders of the city of Rome, were born. Their mother died at their birth, and a wolf suckled them. When, because of Israel's sin, the prophet Elijah was translated,

Rome attained to power and distinction. The more Israel sinned, the stronger and mightier grew Rome. On the first of January, it celebrates the feast of Kratesis, world-domination, and, therefore, designates this day as the first of the year. And now it rules over the major portion of the world. It has overthrown Judah, and the holy dwelling of our God lies in ruins."

The ambassadors arrived in Rome, and were received in solemn audience by Emperor Domitian. Nachum congratulated the Emperor upon his accession to the throne, and handed him the gift of the Jews. The Emperor admired the magnificent little coffer. But when he opened it and perceived its contents, he started back.

"The Jews wish to make fun of me," he cried out. "Lead these madmen, who have brought me a coffer full of earth, to their death."

When Nachum heard the words of the Emperor, he said: "This, too, is for the best."

The bodyguards of the king hastened up, seized the Jews, and led them away.

One of the grandees of Rome was Flavius Clemens, the cousin of the Emperor.

"All powerful Emperor," he said, "ruler of the world, peer of the gods, permit me to utter a word in favor of the Jews. I passed the sea-voyage in the company of these Jews, and learned to know them as rational, thoughtful men. Would they be so foolish as to mock you, the ruler of the world, and to wish to arouse the wrath of the mighty lion? When we were crossing the sea, a fearful storm arose; the ship threatened to be dashed to pieces; I brought Domitilla, my despairing wife, into the hold of the ship. When I again ascended the deck, I found the ship's captain and all his crew dis-

couraged and ready to die. Then one of the Jews raised his hands towards Heaven, and prayed to his God. And, behold, the storm was appeased, the waves became calm—we were saved. Therefore, O Emperor, permit me to express my opinion with regard to this gift of the Jews. Their ancestral father was named Abraham. He, with a few servants, waged war upon four victorious kings and conquered them. The Jews have a tradition that Abraham threw a handful of earth in the direction of his enemies and, only in this way, overcame them. Perhaps the Jews have again found this bit of earth and have made you a present of it, more valuable than gold and jewels.”

The Emperor listened attentively to the words of his relative. Domitian had not yet earned any laurels in war; his father Vespasian had never allowed him to take part in military campaigns. It had been prophesied to him that Domitian would fall by the sword, and the old Emperor had believed so fully in the fulfillment of this prophecy that, when his younger son had once at the table refused to eat mushrooms, he said to him: “Eat, my son, you need have no fear of being poisoned; it is steel that will put an end to your life.” Also during the short reign of Titus, no opportunity had offered itself to Domitian to distinguish himself upon the battlefield. But Domitian thirsted after military fame. His most ardent desire was to enter Rome in triumph, as his father and brother had done. Disturbing reports had come in from Germany. The fierce Chatti had made an attack upon the Roman province and attempted to take possession of the fortress of Moguntiacum (Mayence). Domitian had determined to undertake a campaign against the Chatti, and, as leader of his armies, to

obtain the hotly-desired military glory. If Clemens were speaking the truth, the dreaded Germans could be vanquished without danger to himself, and the Emperor, returning as victor, could enter Rome in triumph and assume the title of Germanicus, as conqueror of the Germans.

"Well," he said, "I shall test whether this earth possesses the powers which you attribute to it, Clemens. In the meantime, you may take the prisoners under your protection until my return from the banks of the Rhine. Then I shall take further action concerning them."

Clemens immediately visited the prisoners, and introduced them into his home. Here he received from them the promise to remain in Rome, and then granted them complete liberty.

Akiba spent the greater part of the day with his teacher Nachum, enjoying his instruction just as much as in Gimso. A part of the time he devoted toward making himself familiar with the great metropolis. In Rome, already at that time, there was a numerous Jewish community, in which were several distinguished men. The great sage of the Roman Jews, Theodoros, and friend and contemporary of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, had died shortly before this. Akiba tried to make the acquaintance of as many of this man's scholars as possible. They were in possession of a number of traditions with regard to the religious precepts which govern the life of the Jews outside of the Holy Land, which Akiba, in his overpowering thirst for knowledge, was studying. Through intercourse with them, he perfected himself in the use of the Latin language to such an extent that he soon spoke it correctly and fluently. A Roman Jew, Apella by name, accompanied him about the city, and showed

him its most important edifices. The *thermae*, the public baths, aroused the stranger's interest particularly. In these baths, three thousand people could bathe simultaneously. Two hundred marble columns adorned the building, about which were ranged sixteen hundred stone benches. The single baths were called "*balnea*" and the master of the baths the "*balneator*," which title frequently appears in the Talmud in the abbreviated form of "*Balan*." Not only was the physical development of man cared for in these "*thermae*," through the most manifold variety of baths,—warm, cold, lukewarm,—hot showers, swimming pools, and so on, as well as by means of large spaces for physical exercises, but attention, in the very highest degree, was paid also to the training of the mind. Orators, philosophers, poets and other scholars had their own lecture halls in these *thermae*, and in case of storm, in covered rooms. Charming pleasure-groves, walks planted with tall, majestic plane-trees, made this institute a veritable Elysium. Consideration was shown to every age and to every individual characteristic; each one found here what he needed for his bodily and spiritual development. Here were to be seen large open places (*Ephebea*) within the wide circle which the *thermae* described, upon which boys, through suitable physical exercises, prepared themselves to become capable and powerful men and doughty warriors, tested their skill in foot-races and wrestling-bouts, and practiced the hurling of the discus. Not far from these places were to be observed pools (*Piscinae*) in which swimmers were enjoying themselves. At another part of the *thermae*, the philosophers and thinkers, scholars and artists, of that period were assembled. Amid shady plane-trees and the

ethereal fragrance of flowers, the mind, to the accompaniment of the plashing of fountains, was spurred on to meditation, and the soul nobly exercised. Here one heard learned discussions from the philosophers, and poets declaimed their verses, which were received by the audience with admiration. And not infrequently, satirists lashed their audience with biting addresses. Others, again, went into the libraries, in order to gain nourishment for their minds in silent solitude. By way of broad alleys of plane-trees, one could pass from this scene of studiousness, which usually lay toward the north, to the exercise grounds and the pleasure-halls of the youth and to the swimming-pools, which lay to the east and west. In the simi-circular amphitheatre, there were seats for the spectators, so that they might watch the performances of the gymnasts and the athletes. The actual building of the *thermae* lay in the centre; the southern entrance was called the "*Theatridum*;" here there were steps upon which the aristocratic Romans sat and entertained themselves by chatting and viewing the games. From these steps, which stretched about the entire building, one could reach the most varied places—the rubbing-down room, where the body was rubbed with salves and oils; the "*consisterium*," that is, the place where the wrestlers covered themselves with sand; the "*palaestra*," a spot where physical exercises for both the sick and the sound were held and the boxers practised; farther on, the most varied assortments of bath-rooms and baths. In addition, there was a chamber in which refreshments were obtainable, and a section which was set off for ball-games. This was the external appearance of the Roman *thermae*, the circumference of which inclosed many acres of land. The inner rooms were resplendent with

the gleam of the gold that had been taken in war, and were filled with those perfect productions of plastic art which had been transported from Greece.

When, one day, Akiba was gazing with astonished interest at all this splendor, a hand was placed on his shoulder, and his friend and protector, the praetor Flavius Clemens, stood before him.

## X.

### THE PRAETOR

"Well, Akiba," asked Clemens, "are you contemplating the marvels of our splendid, world-dominating Rome?"

"Rome is great, beautiful, and majestic," replied Akiba, "but all its thoughts are directed only to the enjoyment of earthly life. All these glories will one day vanish, together with the gods who are worshipped here."

"Take care, Akiba, and restrain your tongue. As praetor, supreme judge of this city, to which the Emperor's grace has raised me for the duration of the German campaign, I ought actually to have you punished for insulting the gods. But fear nothing. You are under the protection of a higher Being, as I saw during the crossing of the sea. However, I observe, to my astonishment, that you now speak our language fluently. Come to my house. I wish to present you to my wife; Domitilla has long desired to make your acquaintance."

Domitilla, the wife of Clemens, was a granddaughter of the Emperor Vespasian, the daughter of a sister of the two Emperors, Titus and Domitian.

"Here," said Clemens, as he entered the room of his wife with Akiba, "I bring to you our Jewish guest, to whose prayer we owe it that we were not drowned in the sea."

"Welcome, my friend," said Domitilla, "I have long been eager to express to you my gratitude."

"I must reject these thanks, mistress," answered Akiba. "Not because of me did God save the ship, but because my teacher was aboard, a devout, holy man, for whom God has already worked many miracles; but I am only an insignificant pupil, a beginner in the sciences."

"If you are only a beginner," said Clemens, "you have certainly learned much already. With amazement I observe how quickly, during your brief stay in Rome, you have mastered the Latin language. You speak our tongue not only correctly, but with the very elegance of a Cicero."

"Who is Cicero?" asked Akiba.

"Cicero," replied Clemens, "was a Roman senator, the greatest orator of our people. The addresses which he delivered in the Senate are models of eloquence. Our youth is thoroughly trained in them. He was also a philosopher, and the fatherland is greatly indebted to him."

"What is a philosopher?" queried Akiba.

"Philosopher," answered Clemens, "actually means: friend of wisdom. A man is called philosopher who strives, by his own reasoning, to answer the most difficult questions of human speculation, who, independently of the teachings of religion concerning the gods, sets up a system of the universe and the control of the universe and formulates his moral teachings, not in accordance with traditional precepts, but with the results of his own contemplations. One of my friends, Artemidorus, is a great thinker and teacher of wisdom. If you wish, I shall make you acquainted with him."

"I should be grateful to you for that," answered Akiba. "My most ardent wish is to learn from scholars."

"You have not yet congratulated me," said Clemens,

"upon my attainment to the dignity of praetor, supreme judge of this city, which the favor of the Emperor has bestowed upon me."

"The office of a judge," Akiba said thoughtfully, "conceals within itself a heavy responsibility. In the Holy Scriptures, we read: 'Justice is the Lord's.' The judge, our sages teach, who sentences honestly and justly, is like a companion of God in the work of creation. The judge, when he sits in judgment, must see the abyss of hell at his feet, for the severest penalties overtake him, if he pronounces sentence frivolously and thoughtlessly. How much the more, if he accepts a bribe or in any other way intentionally falsifies the truth! Should I felicitate you on your appointment to such an office? It is a weighty burden under which you have bent your shoulders."

"You construe this task," said Clemens, smiling, "much more seriously than any Roman has ever construed it. For me, the office of a praetor is a high, almost an imperial honor, the essence of the supreme power during the absence of the Emperor. Everything in Rome revolves about the person of the ruler; his will is law."

"Permit me, master," said Akiba, "to inform you of the teachings of Judaism on this point. Once, in very ancient times, there dwelt on earth a happy race. Men and women attained a hoary age, and knew neither disease nor pain. The earth yielded its products in abundance, and no one experienced a lack of nourishment."

"The golden age!" Domitilla interrupted.

"Indeed, mistress," continued Akiba, "a golden age, with reference to nature and her gifts; but men abused the precious gifts of God; they allowed their passions

free rein, there ensued the greatest moral corruption, and the earth was full of violence; the strong man oppressed the weak, robbed him of his wife, and made of his children slaves. The Almighty decided to blot from the face of the earth the sinful race, and only Noah and his family, who were pious and walked in the ways of the Lord, found favor in the eyes of the Eternal. The Almighty commanded Noah to build an ark, a large ship, for himself and his family and the animals which God wished to save. Then God caused it to rain for forty days and forty nights, the windows of heaven were opened, the springs of the innermost earth ascended, and a terrible flood covered the whole world, even the tops of the highest mountains, and all living things—with the exception of the fish, who live in the water, and Noah and those with him in the ark—were drowned.”

“Deucalion!” exclaimed Domitilla.

“Who is Deucalion?” asked Akiba.

“Deucalion,” answered Domitilla, “was the father of Hellen, the ancestor of the Hellenes or Greeks. He was the son of Prometheus and the husband of Pyrrha. When Zeus, the father of the gods, had resolved to destroy the human race by water, he (Deucalion) constructed, at the advice of his father, a wooden box, in which he and his wife were tossed about on the waves during the nine-day flood, and finally, when the waters subsided, landed on Parnassus. At his inquiry as to how he could again people the earth, he received from the oracle the reply that he and his wife should throw behind them the bones of their mother. This obscure utterance they interpreted to mean that their mother was the earth and its bones stones. They did as the oracle

had commanded; from the stones cast by Deucalion sprang up men, from those cast by Pyrrha women."

"It is possible," said Akiba, "that the Greeks have preserved the memory of the great flood; in any case, they have distorted history. But let me continue with my narrative, mistress. When the great flood was at an end, and Noah abandoned the ark, God gave laws to him and his sons. One of these laws is to permit duty, right, and justice to rule on earth, to protect the weak from the power of the strong, so that the earth should not again become full of malice and wrongdoing. That is the sacred office of the judge, to defend the life and property of his fellow-men from robbers and oppressors. If the will of one man is to be law, the earth will again become full of violence, and no man is sure of his life and his possessions. Only law must rule on earth, and this law must not be arbitrarily laid down, but must be the effluence of the divine wisdom. The all-merciful God, the Creator of the universe, has given us laws which regulate our life. He revealed Himself, in His majesty, to His people, forbade having other gods besides Him and desecrating His name, and commanded us to sanctify the Sabbath, to honor our parents, to respect the life and the property of our fellow-men, to keep the marriage-tie holy, and always speak the truth; he bade us master our thoughts, and permit no lusting after the wife or the property of another to become uppermost in our minds."

"What you are saying there," put in Domitilla, "sounds quite different from the principles in which we have been raised."

A servant appeared and announced that the meal was ready.

"Will you not be our guest, Akiba?" asked Domitilla.

"I thank you, mistress," answered Akiba; "I am not permitted to eat at your table. God gave us special laws concerning food and drink. Many animals whose flesh you eat are for us unclean, and even the clean animals must be slaughtered and prepared in a particular manner."

"Then where do you eat?" asked Clemens.

"My teacher and I," replied Akiba, "content ourselves during the week with bread and fruit; on the Sabbath, we eat at the home of a Jewish friend, whose house is on the Tiber."

"I shall send you," said Domitilla, "some of the precious fruits that grow on our estates. But I request you to come to our house often, and to tell us of the doctrines of Judaism."

## XI.

### THE MAGIC EARTH

The Emperor had advanced with his troops to the Rhine, where the Chatti were besieging Moguntiacum. When the Germans became aware of the approach of the Roman army under the personal leadership of the Emperor, they drew near to give battle. Then Domitian had the earth, which was contained in the little coffer of Nachum, strewn in their direction. A terrible fright seized the Germans and they fled. But the Romans pursued them, and took many of them prisoners. The Chatti then sent ambassadors to the Emperor and promised submission. A treaty which was very advantageous to the Romans was drawn up, and the excellent results of this campaign were seen in the calm which continued to prevail in this region, and in the Latinized population of the adjacent districts, which, a few years later, Rome put in a position to unite for all time with the Empire.

Flushed with the joy of victory, the Emperor hastened back to Rome. The Senate sent a deputation to meet him, and announced to him that it deemed him worthy of a triumphal procession. Therefore, Domitian remained without the city until the preparation for the solemnities were completed. Then, at the head of his troops, adorned with the insignia of his military command, he marched through the gate of victory into the city, and proceeded, by way of the most important streets, to the Capitol, where he offered the national oblation to Jupiter.

The Emperor was highly rejoiced by the honors that had now fallen to his share. The people applauded, and the soldiers, who had received an extra sum with their pay, broke out into exclamations of joy as he entered the city, and brandished their fearsome weapons. The poets composed hymns in his praise. The Senate gave him the honorary appellation of Germanicus, and added this name to the month of September. In the midst of his joy, the Emperor had the Jewish deputies come into his presence. He thanked them for the priceless gift which they had bestowed upon him, and had costly presents distributed among them. Nachum and his companions began preparations for departure and Akiba took leave of his kindly hosts, Clemens and Domitilla.

"You are now to depart from us," said the latter, "but the seed that you have sowed in us will sprout. My husband and I already feel penetrated by the conviction that Israel's God is the sole God, and that there is none other beside Him."

"Any one of the heathens," replied Akiba, "who attains to the recognition of the unity of God resembles our father Abraham. He, too, lived in the midst of a pagan world. His father, his mother, his brothers and sisters, and all of mankind who were living at that time, were idolaters."

"How did Abraham," asked Clemens, "attain to the recognition of the unity of God?"

"King Nimrod," answered Akiba, "at whose court Terach, the father of Abraham, lived, wished to have the latter killed, immediately after his birth. But Terach concealed him and his mother for many years in a cave. When Abraham left the cave, he gazed in wonderment

upon all the phenomena which to us are matters-of-fact. He asked concerning the origin of the sun, the moon, the stars and the earth, about mountains, rivers, trees, animals, and human beings. He could not comprehend how idols of wood and stone could have created this beautiful, flawless world. 'They have a mouth,' he said to himself, 'and they speak not, they have eyes and see not, they have ears and hear not, they have a nose and smell not; with their hands they are unable to grasp and with their feet they cannot walk, nor is there any voice in their throat.' By means of long, steady meditation, Abraham at last arrived at the recognition of the one, omnipotent, invisible God. And God revealed Himself to him, and taught him the highest truth. Then Abraham shattered the idols of his father, and when Nimrod had him seized for this and thrown into a fiery furnace, the Almighty delivered him, and commanded him to wander to the shores of the Jordan. Here Abraham made known the name of God, and reared in his way of thinking his son Isaac, whom God had granted him late in life. Isaac's son, Jacob, became the ancestor of our people, and God made over to his descendants the land which he had promised to Abraham."

"We, too, shall take pains," said Clemens, "to ponder over the sublime things that you have taught us. My wife and I find no satisfaction in the doctrine of the multiform gods of our nation. Domitian has no children; Domitilla and I are next in the order of blood-relationship; perhaps he will adopt me or one of my two sons; and if I or my son will ever be clad in the imperial purple, you will hear from me, Akiba!"

Nachum and his companions started back for Judea. When they came to Brundisium, the thievish inn-keeper

learned, with great astonishment, of the miraculous quality which was said to reside in the earth with which he had filled the little coffer of Nachum. The inn-keeper and his wife loaded a large wagon with similar earth, and brought it to Rome. At about this time, the Dacians on the lower Danube had risen in revolt. The Emperor entrusted the chief command in the campaign against the Dacians to Cornelius Fuscus, the prefect of the praetorian guards. The earth from Brundisium was to help him wrest the victory. But it completely failed of effect. The leader of the Dacians, Decabalus, retreated with his hordes from the plains of Moesia, and thereby lured Fuscus to cross the Danube and to follow the retreat of his troops until he, Decabalus, could advantageously attack him. In spite of the fact that the earth from Brundisium was strewn in the faces of the enemy, the Romans suffered an overwhelming defeat; Fuscus fell in the struggle; the bodies of thousands of Roman soldiers covered the battle-field; the eagles of the legions fell into the hands of the foe as trophies of victory. When this news reached Rome, the Emperor had the Brundisian inn-keeper and his wife seized. They were put to death amid the most fearful tortures, and thus received their merited punishment.

It was a joyful return, when Akiba reached home and embraced his wife and children. The gifts of the Emperor, a part of which had been allotted also to him, sufficed to satisfy the modest needs of his family for a considerable period of time. Thus he was permitted to hope that he might again be able to devote himself, undisturbed, to the study of the Torah. But when he sought his revered teacher, he found the latter in a terrible condition. Nachum had become blind in both eyes,

his hands and feet were paralyzed, and running sores covered his whole body. When Akiba saw him, he began to weep aloud.

"Rabbi," he cried out, "how did you fall into this frightful state?"

"I drew all this down upon myself," answered Nachum. "I wished to pay a visit to the house of my father-in-law; I had with me three asses, laden with food, drink, and all kinds of costly things. When I arrived, a poor man placed himself in my path, and pleaded: 'Give me something to eat, Rabbi, otherwise I shall die of hunger!' 'Wait,' I answered him, 'until I have unloaded my asses.' While I was still occupied with the task of unloading, the unfortunate man died. At this, I exclaimed: 'Alas, alas, I have brought about the death of this man!' I cast myself upon him and said: 'May my eyes, which did not have pity on you, become blind; may my feet, which hesitated to hasten to your assistance, be paralyzed; may my arms, which did not hand you nourishment at the proper time, grow rigid—and may my body be covered with running sores!'"

"Woe unto me," cried Akiba, "that I behold you in this condition!"

"It is well for me," replied Nachum, "that I am receiving in this world the punishment for my crime."

Although Nachum lay upon the sick-bed, he did not cease to instruct his pupils in the holy Law. When once, during a severe winter, much snow had fallen, the loosely-constructed house in which Nachum lived could not support the heavy burden of snow, and was on the point of collapsing. The pupils were about to carry out the bed of the sick master. But Nachum said: "My children, first remove the vessels; for I know that as long as

I am in this house, it will not fall in." And this actually proved to be the case. After the entire house had been cleared, the pupils bore the bed of their suffering teacher into the open. Scarcely had they left the house with him, when it fell to pieces.

The illness of Nachum lasted only a short while longer. Soon afterwards, all Israel was mourning the death of the great master.

Akiba now resolved to go to Jabneh, where, in those days, the greatest teachers in Israel were giving instruction. At the head of the academy was Rabban Gamaliel, the Prince. He was a descendant of Hillel, and his family had been in possession of the princely estate for more than a hundred years. Hillel had been succeeded by his son Simon, he by his son Simon, he by his son Gamaliel; the latter had been followed by his son Simeon ben Gamaliel, who had died in the war with Vespasian. His son Gamaliel was, at that time, too young to be raised to the dignity of Prince of the Community; for that reason, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai had assumed the office. After the latter's death, Rabban Gamaliel had been chosen head of the institution. At his side were the great teachers, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah. Besides them, there were many other renowned men in Jabneh, of whom we may mention only Rabbi Tarphon and Rabbi Jochanan ben Nuri.

This was the place in which the holy well of the Torah bubbled in richest abundance; here Akiba could appease his overpowering thirst for knowledge.

## XII.

### RECONCILED

At first, Akiba found himself in a very difficult position at Jabneh; in many ways, the customs of his earlier life clung to him, customs which did not correspond to the purity and holiness of the mode of life of the learned men who assembled about Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Elieser, and Rabbi Joshua. Rabban Gamaliel performed his duties as prince with the utmost severity; even the great men who stood at his side sometimes did not escape reproof, as we shall see later; how much more sternly were the pupils treated by him! And Akiba fell short in many details, partly from ignorance, partly from ingrained habit. It was Rabbi Jochanan ben Nuri who inexorably reported to the prince the failing of the no longer youthful pupil, and, thereby, often brought down upon him severe punishments, as Rabbi Jochanan himself testifies (Erechin 16 b) . . . "I call upon heaven and earth to testify that Akiba often suffered penalties on my account because I accused him before Rabban Gamaliel, but he loved me all the more for this reason, just as we read in the Scriptures: 'Do not reprove the scoffer, lest he hate thee; chastise the wise man, and he will love thee.'"

Akiba was in an unpleasant situation also with regard to scientific attainments; he could not venture, in the midst of this learned assembly, to open his mouth and take part in the scholarly discussions; he felt that his knowledge was still too meagre. Thus, he sat for twelve

long years at the feet of his teachers, as one who is dumb and does not open his mouth, and frequently Rabbi Elieser gave vent to his lack of inclination for this silent pupil; but Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah recognized the depth of his attentiveness, despite his reticence. Akiba, the sages tell us, resembled during this period a dealer who, carrying a large basket upon his shoulder, purchases everything that is to be bought—wheat, barley, flax, and so on; he takes it and places it all in his large basket. When the dealer, heavily laden, returns home, he sorts the wares he has acquired; he lays the wheat in one pile, the barley in another, and thus with everything else that he has bought. Akiba, too, conducted himself in this manner; he stored in his memory everything that was discussed in the academy, and, in the solitude of his home, he attempted to set in order all that he had gained.

Driven by his unquenchable thirst for knowledge, Akiba sometimes acted with seeming audacity. He would follow his teacher, Rabbi Joshua, everywhere, in order to observe how he conducted himself. On one occasion he almost exposed himself, through his eager pursuit of learning, to serious unpleasantness. One day, he met one of the most brilliant men of the time, Rabbi Nechuniah, who had been called “the Great” because of his vast scholarship. Rabbi Nechuniah had been a comrade of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai and, consequently, was at that time well advanced in years. Akiba came before him and asked: “Rabbi, what have you done to aid you to attain to such old age?” The servants of the Rabbi saw in this question an insult leveled at their master, and wished to seize the bold questioner and

punish him for his audacity. Akiba escaped and sought refuge in a tree.

From the top of the tree he called down: "Rabbi, since the Hebrew word 'Kebes' means 'one lamb,' why" (in Numbers XXVIII 4) "is it followed by the word 'Echad' (one)?" "Leave him in peace," Rabbi Nechuniah thereupon ordered his servants, "he is a learned man, and asked how I became so old, not out of idle curiosity, but in order to learn." Then Akiba descended from the tree, and the Rabbi said: "I shall answer both of your questions. The word 'one' indicates that the best lamb of the flock must always be set aside to be sacrificed. And how I became old? I have never accepted gifts, in accordance with the scriptural admonition, which reads: 'He who hates gifts will live.' Furthermore, I have never repaid evil for evil, and since I have pardoned my fellow-men the insults inflicted upon me, the all-merciful God also forgave me whenever I sinned; moreover, I have striven to apply the treasure bestowed upon me by God to the welfare of my fellow-men, and have, as a result, lent to the poor the money which they needed in order to support themselves in independence."

"Thanks, Rabbi," said Akiba, "for your instruction; I shall make every effort to imitate you."

Finally, at the end of twelve years, Akiba ventured to oppose his teachers with an opinion of his own. The question concerned itself with the religious precepts which are to be observed in offering up the Passover sacrifice, when the eve of the festival falls on a Sabbath. All agreed that the Passover sacrifice must be offered up on the Sabbath; Rabbi Elieser and Rabbi Joshua disputed only with respect to certain preparations; Rabbi Elieser seemed already to have carried off the victory

in the debate; but Akiba came forward and made it perfectly clear that the Holy Scriptures affirm that such preparations as could be carried out before the Sabbath could not annul the sanctity of the Sabbath. And Akiba emerged the victor. Henceforth, he was looked upon by both teachers and pupils with entirely different eyes.—“See,” said Rabbi Joshua to Rabbi Elieser, applying the words of the Scriptures, “this is the people which you have esteemed lightly; now go forth and do battle with it.”

On that memorable day, there had arisen in Israel a new sun which shone majestically upon the horizon and with its light illumined the world. The deep knowledge, the penetrating intellect, the all-containing memory, and the thoroughly scientific spirit of Akiba were admired by all. If it was a question of establishing a tradition, and Akiba was not present, they would say: “The tradition is absent!” that is to say, Akiba, whose knowledge embraces all the traditional prescriptions, is not here. If it was a question of determining the true meaning of a word or of a sentence of the sacred lore, they would say: “The Torah is absent!” or, in other words, Akiba, who has penetrated farthest into the spirit of the sacred teachings, is not here. If it was a question of ascertaining something that was connected with mathematics, astronomy, biology, or other sciences, they would say: “Akiba is absent!” The questions were not answered until the missing one had returned and modestly seated himself at the feet of Rabbi Elieser.

It was not long before the sages of Israel promoted their former pupil, Akiba, from the rank of student to that of teacher, and a wide circle of youths, eager to learn, formed about him.

Akiba had not seen his wife and his children for twelve years. Only once had he determined to visit them. When, on that occasion he reached the threshold of his house, he heard loud, quarrelsome voices. One of the neighbors was rebuking Rachel for remaining attached, with inflexible devotion, to a man who had been tarrying so long in strange scenes and had certainly long since forgotten her.

"Why?" asked the neighbor, "do you wish, for the sake of this man, to load upon yourself your father's hatred? Tear in pieces the bond which ties you to this ungrateful fellow, return repentantly to your father, and he will receive you and your children with open arms."

"Do not scold my husband," replied Rachel. "It is with my consent, at my wish, that he is remaining away so long. Oh, if he were only to become a sage in Israel, I should not grieve if he were to remain away even longer."

Akiba had heard the words of the magnanimous woman, and returned to Jabneh, without even having embraced his wife and his children.

At last the wish of the noble Rachel was fulfilled, and Rabbi Akiba was hastily returning home, his numerous pupils accompanying him.

From all sides people streamed to see the celebrated sage whose name had previously been but slightly known and who was now traversing the land in the company of a throng of pupils. The news was also heard by Rachel; and her heart trembled with rapturous joy; she set out to meet her beloved husband. She saw him surrounded by his pupils; she wished to hasten to him,

but the pupils would not permit it. Rabbi Akiba caught sight of her.

"Rachel," he cried, "my beloved Rachel, wife of my heart, to whom I owe everything!"

Then he turned to his pupils and said:

"This is Rachel, my precious, noble wife. I am indebted to her for what I have become. Without her, I should to-day still be an ignorant shepherd!"

During the long succession of years which had flown by since the beginning of our narrative, Kalba Sabua had spent a life full of mourning. Despite this, his stubborn mind had not yielded. He had rejected all the attempts of his daughter and his son-in-law at reconciliation. Now he was an old, solitary man. He felt that he was approaching the grave, and he had but one remaining wish; namely, to bequeath his vast fortune to benevolent institutions and communal enterprises. Then he heard that a great teacher of Israel had come into the vicinity in which he lived. He resolved to visit him and take counsel with him on the division of his possessions.

When he appeared before Rabbi Akiba, he did not recognize his former servant.

"Rabbi," he said, "I should like to ask your advice. I wish to form a decision concerning the division of my estate after my death."

"Have you no child," asked Rabbi Akiba, "to whom you will bequeath your fortune?"

"I had a daughter," answered the old man, "but, against my will, she married a poor, ignorant shepherd. At that time I made a vow to disinherit her."

"If that poor man has become a scholar," asked Rabbi Akiba, "and if you had known that he would

become one, would you, at that time, have bound yourself by that vow?"

"It was less the poverty than the ignorance of the man that angered me; he could not even read and write."

"If he, later, became a man whose knowledge the world recognizes, if he became a man such as I?"

"Oh, how happy should I deem myself if the choice of my daughter had fallen upon a man such as you!"

"My father, my name is Akiba ben Joseph; I was formerly a shepherd in your service, and your daughter Rachel is my beloved wife!"

Then Kalba Sabua lifted up his voice and wept.

"Can you pardon me, Rabbi?" he sobbed.

"I have nothing to pardon you; you were within your rights. But now I absolve you of your vow which you once made under false presumptions; I pull it up as though by the roots: it is as if it had never been; for, if you could have suspected what would later take place, you would never have uttered that vow."

"God bless you, Rabbi," said Kalba Sabua amid tears. "Come into my house with me. Half of my fortune I shall give over to you immediately, and the other half will become yours before very long."

Rabbi Akiba sent for Rachel. When she came, and saw her father, she sank at his feet and embraced his knees. Kalba Sabua raised her and kissed her repeatedly.

"My daughter," he said, "you saw into the future more clearly than I. Forgive me for having brought upon you, by my hard-heartedness, so much misery and anxiety."

"No, no, my father," replied Rachel, "not misery and anxiety were my lot, but the highest joy and the

greatest happiness that can be granted a woman. For the noblest and wisest man on earth is my husband; I have children who are walking in his footsteps and will one day be, as he, the staff and stay of Israel! Only your love has until now been lacking me, my father. Now that you are again reconciled to me, my happiness is complete!"

"God bless you, my daughter. And so, my old age is no longer lonesome, since, as you say, grandchildren are also blossoming for me. Oh, bring them into my house in order that the sight of them may rejoice my heart."

It was a real triumphal procession when Rabbi Akiba, with his wife and children, and in the company of his numerous pupils, entered the house of his father-in-law.

Rabbi Akiba was now a wealthy man. The first use that he made of his riches was to have prepared for Rachel a golden diadem, into which the hand of a skillful artist engraved the outlines of the holy city of Jerusalem. Akiba had promised this in the days of deepest poverty, when Rachel, although herself so poor, had supported others still more needy. And Rachel, the pious, modest Rachel, wore this diadem with joyous pride, not in order to make a show of it, but so that the other daughters of Israel might learn how much a weak woman is able to accomplish in behalf of the Divine Law.

### XIII.

#### THE EMPEROR'S DECISION

Rabbi Akiba had removed, with his family, to Jabneh, and here he was soon to be signally distinguished. Rabbi Joshua ben Alam, who was in charge of the poor-relief for all Israel, had died, and it was generally desired that the high post of honor which the deceased had filled be bestowed upon the son-in-law of Kalba Sabua. The distinction that was to be shown to Akiba was all the greater from the fact that Rabbi Joshua ben Alam had enjoyed the highest esteem in the eyes of the entire nation. A remarkable story is told us, in ancient books, of this man. Once, while he was lying in deep slumber, he became aware of a voice, which exclaimed: "Rejoice Joshua, rejoice, for you shall have a seat in Paradise next to the butcher Nannes."—Rabbi Joshua ben Alam, who from earliest childhood had dedicated his life to God, the man whom eighty pupils revered as their master, who had presided over the poor-relief with the greatest conscientiousness and unselfishness, was eager to make the acquaintance of the simple laborer, for being placed next to whom in the coming world, he was to rejoice. He journeyed with his pupils from city to city, until he found the butcher Nannes. The latter was a plain man, who walked humbly in the ways of God; but he had aged parents who were weak and sickly. Nannes treated his parents with the utmost care and reverence; he had no more pressing duty than to wait upon them; he himself clothed them, brought them

their food, and anticipated with wondrous forethought each of their wishes. All that he could possibly do, he did; nor did he entrust the task to any servant. When Rabbi Joshua ben Alam heard this, he embraced and kissed the man, and exclaimed: "Hail to you; I deem myself fortunate that I shall be permitted to be your comrade in Paradise."

Now Rabbi Joshua ben Alam had died, and had assumed the place in Paradise which had been promised him. Rabbi Akiba was to be his successor in the post of honor which he had so worthily graced. But Rabbi Akiba said:

"I cannot accept this office until I have received permission from my wife. I promised her to devote all my time to the study of the Torah; for this reason, she has the right to decide whether she considers the performance of this weighty task on a par with study."

Rachel had no objections to offer, and thus the former shepherd of Kalba Sabua was placed at the head of the entire poor-relief. Rabbi Akiba conducted himself in this office with the same energy which he displayed in all other matters. Soon he became a father and protector of the poor, who heaped blessings upon his head. Let us mention only one illustration of his method of procuring the necessary funds. Rabbi Tarphon, formerly Akiba's teacher, now his friend, was richly endowed with the goods of this world. One day Akiba approached him and said.

"My friend and teacher, the opportunity is offered me of making several very profitable purchases. Have you, perhaps, a fairly large sum of money on hand? I should very much like to make the purchase for you." Rabbi Tarphon gave him four thousand pieces of gold,

which Rabbi Akiba spent for his poor. In the evening, he went to his friend and said:

"I must bring to you the deed of purchase which I received for your money."

Then he showed him the ninth verse of the hundred and twelfth psalm, which reads:

"He scattereth his goods and giveth lavishly to the poor; his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted in honor."

Rabbi Tarphon kissed his friend, and gave him greater sums for similar purchases.

When Rabbi Akiba, one day, wished to enter the House of Learning, he found it locked. The door-keeper said that he had been requested to tell Rabbi Akiba that he should go to the home of the prince, Rabban Gamaliel. Thither Rabbi Akiba hastened, and found, at the home of the prince, his teacher, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, the still very young but already exceedingly learned Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah; and, besides these two, a stranger, in whom Rabbi Akiba recognized his old friend Thaddeus of Rome, whom he greeted most cordially. But Thaddeus wore an expression of sadness, and said:

"Let us lose no time, great teachers in Israel. Seat yourselves, and permit me to lay before you the contents of my message. Our brothers in Rome have sent me to ask you to set out for Rome at once. Terrible dangers threaten all Israel; in order to make them clear to you, I shall have to explain myself at some length. Therefore, seat yourselves and hear my words."

The Sages did as the emissary of the Roman Jews requested, and the latter continued:

"Emperor Domitian, the brother of that Titus who destroyed the house of our God, is a man whose character

is of the most diametrically opposed qualities. I must elaborate on this point in order that you should know the nature of the dangers that threaten us. The Flavii are upstarts. Vespasian was of humble origin, his birth-place having been the Sabine town of Reate. The provincial views of the founder of the dynasty cling also to his younger son, the present Emperor. His ideal is to restore the old religious and moral conditions of the days of the Republic, though he himself despises and daily violates them. He has had himself deified, and punishes with death, as an act of blasphemy, every condemnatory utterance that is brought to his ears. In spite of this, he punishes just as severely the neglect of the ancient gods, while he encourages his sycophants to deride and heap scorn upon his royal predecessors, who also had themselves declared gods. As far as morals are concerned, he refused to marry Julia, the only daughter of Titus, because an old Roman law forbids a man to marry his niece, a law which was abolished in the days of Claudius. But when Titus died and Domitian became Emperor, he had Julia's husband killed, and entered upon an illicit relationship with the niece whom he had deemed it improper to make his wife. His own wife, Domitia, was the wife of another: he seduced her, and compelled the husband to divorce her. All this does not prevent him from punishing most sternly any transgression of good morals among the people; only recently, he had a Vestal virgin buried alive, although she insistently protested her innocence.—You know, my teachers, that the majority of the population of Rome is imbued with a strong disinclination, an invincible loathing, for the old gods. Many have turned to the idolatry of the Egyptians, but the hearts of a large number of

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prominent citizens have also opened up to the eternal truth which Judaism teaches. The latter fact is a thorn in the side of the Emperor. When anyone is accused of inclination towards Judaism, he decrees the sentence of death or exile. Nevertheless, he has not succeeded in compelling their hearts, despite numerous executions. More and more of the nobles are turning to Judaism. The foremost of these is Flavius Clemens; he is a son of Sabinus, the only brother of Vespasian; his wife, Domitilla, is a daughter of the sister of Titus and Domitian. One day, Clemens summoned the heads of our community, and informed them that Domitian had decided, in order to prevent the spread of Judaism, to have all the Jews in the Roman Empire slain."

When the sages heard this frightful report, they rent their garments and wept. Thaddeus, too, joined in their lamentations. Then he dried his tears and continued:

"No such calamity has threatened our much-oppressed people since the days of Haman. In vain Clemens made representations to the Emperor and pointed out to him how much the poll-tax of the Jews—for we have to pay a per capita tax of two drachms, twice as much as the other subjected nations yearly—adds to the royal treasury. This time, his desire to re-establish the throne of the old gods is greater than his greed for money. 'Send to Judaea,' said Clemens to the heads of our community, 'and advise the sages to appoint a fast-day and order prayers to be read in all the synagogues of the land. They themselves shall come to Rome, in order to take counsel with me and my friends as to what is to be done. We have strong allies in the city, for the most aristocratic citizens and senators tremble for their

lives. Against the philosophers and the foremost thinkers of the nation, too, the tyrant is raging, and threatens them with death and banishment.' For this reason, the heads of the Jewish community in Rome have sent me hither to bring to you the message of Flavius Clemens; I have fulfilled my commission. You, now, take counsel, and act as the spirit of God, which rests upon you, will move you."

"We shall do as our friend Clemens has advised," said Rabbi Gamaliel. "The people will fast on every second and fifth day of the week, and the synagogues will be open from morning until evening. I shall set out on the road to Rome. Will you accompany me, my friends?"

"I shall go with you," said Rabbi Joshua.

"And I shall not remain behind," spoke up Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah.

"And you, Akiba," said Rabban Gamaliel, "you are silent?"

"Surely there are many worthier men," answered Rabbi Akiba, "who are more deserving of the high honor of being permitted to accompany you: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Tarphon, Rabbi Ishmael, Rabbi Judah ben Baba, and many others. Would it not offend them if one of them were to be left behind on my account?"

"Your modesty honors you," replied Rabban Gamaliel; "but Thaddeus has already informed us that Clemens expressed the wish that you, in particular, should accompany us. On this account, too, we called you, and none of the others, to this conference. Do you, perhaps, first wish to ask the advice of your wife, Akiba?"

"Not at all," answered Rabbi Akiba with a smile, "where you are, my prince, and where Rabbi Joshua and

Rabbi Elasar are, there is the Torah, and every moment in your company increases my knowledge. My wife will be happy in the thought that, during the journey, I may warm myself from the rays which proceed from the brightest lights of Israel."

## XIV.

### LAUGHTER AND WEEPING

Rabban Gamaliel, the prince, had ordered prayers to be read in the synagogues throughout Judea, and had appointed each second and fifth day of the week to be days of fasting; he himself, and the friends who were to accompany him, first visited the ruins of the holy Temple, in order fervently to pray, at its Western Wall, for the success of their journey. When they reached the summit of the mountain overlooking Jerusalem and saw the devastated Capital lying before them, they burst into tears, tore their garments, and said: "Zion has become a desert, a wilderness; our holy, resplendent Temple, in which our ancestors worshipped the Almighty, has been turned into a heap of ashes, and all our joy has changed to sorrow."

Then Rabban Gamaliel said in a loud voice:

"Oh, God, the nations have entered Thy possession, have defiled Thy holy Temple, have made Jerusalem a heap of ruins, have given the corpses of Thy servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of Thy pious ones to the wild beasts, have shed their blood like water around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury them. We have become the laughing-stock of our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those about us. How long yet, O God? Wilt Thou retain Thy anger eternally? Will Thy indignation gleam like fire perpetually? Pour out Thy wrath upon those barbarians who did not wish to know Thee, and upon the nations who do not call upon

Thy name but who devour Jacob and make desolate his dwelling-places. Do not hold against us our past transgression; come soon to meet us with mercy, for we are sadly impoverished. Help us, O God, our Deliverer, for the glory of Thy name; save us, forgive us our trespasses for the sake of Thy name. Why shall the heathen say: 'Where is their God?' Let it become known among the nations before our eyes that Thou dost not indifferently permit the blood of Thy servants to be shed. May the groans of those who are threatened with disaster penetrate to Thee; liberate with Thy powerful arm those who are dedicated to death! Repay our malicious neighbors sevenfold for the blasphemy with which they desecrate Thy name, O Lord! But we, Thy people, the flock of Thy pasture, we will acknowledge Thee to eternity, announce Thy praise to all generations to come!"

The others listened to him in silence; they then broke out into lamentations, rent their garments, and cried aloud: "Praised be Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, Thou truthful Judge! He is the Rock, perfect is His work, for all His ways are just; the God of righteousness, in Him there is no wrong, wise and upright is He!"

Then they descended the mountains, until they came to the Western Wall of the Temple. Here they drew off their shoes, and prayed in fervent devotion. Suddenly a fox, coming from the vicinity, ran across the spot where once the Holy of Holies of the Temple had stood. Thereupon, the sages of Israel lifted up their voices and wept sorely; Rabbi Akiba alone remained silent; a smile transfigured his countenance. The sages said to him: "Akiba, why are you laughing?" But the latter asked: "My teachers, why are you weeping?" Then they said:

"In the Holy of Holies, which was permitted to be entered only once a year in purity and sanctity, by the high-priest, in the Holy of Holies, of which it is written: 'Every layman who approaches shall be put to death,' there foxes are now running wild, and should not the eyes which behold that overflow with tears?"

"My masters," replied Rabbi Akiba, "it is for this very reason that I rejoice. We are told in the Holy Writings: 'I shall take unto myself a faithful witness—Uriah, the priest, and Zachariah, the son of Berachya.' How do these two come together? Did not Uriah live at the time of the first Temple and Zachariah in the days of the second Temple? But the Scriptures unite the prophecy of Zachariah to that of Uriah. With respect to Uriah, we read. 'In truth, because of you shall Zion be ploughed up like a field and Jerusalem become a desert, the Mount of the Temple a wooded height' (Jeremiah XXVI, 20). But in Zachariah we read: 'I shall return to Zion, and rear my throne in Jerusalem's midst; then shall Jerusalem be called the city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain. Thus hath the Lord of Hosts spoken: Again shall old men and women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, leaning on their staffs because of their great age; and the streets of the city will be filled with laughing youths and maids.' As long as the prophecy with regard to Uriah was unfulfilled, I had to fear that Zachariah's promise would also remain unfulfilled. Now that the holy house has, as God promised, become a forest, the dwelling-place of foxes, because of Uriah, we may live in the firm conviction that God will rebuild His holy house and His holy city, as He foretold through His prophet Zachariah."

And the sages said: "You have comforted us, Akiba, you have comforted us."

Full of joyous confidence, the sages of Israel now began their journey; in Jaffa they embarked upon the ship that had been held in readiness for them, and, after an uneventful passage, they landed at Brundisium.

## XV.

### FOREBODINGS.

While Domitian was taking the most violent measures against the patricians and leading citizens of the Roman capital, heaping executions upon executions, and thus inspiring the senators and others who occupied positions, with fear and mortal agony, he was flattering the plebs and the legionaries; the latter he gave double pay, the former he furnished with games, shows, and all kinds of entertainments. The means for all this were supplied by the confiscated properties of the executed senators. He filled the entire city with statues of himself, and the Capital was adorned with numerous images of himself in gilded bronze. Of all these statues, none was so resplendent as the colossal horseman in gilded bronze which was reared in the centre of the Forum before the temple of the Flavian family. Placed upon a lofty pedestal, whence, in the language of poetry, his head towered into the heavens and looked down upon the glittering roofs of the halls and temples of Rome, Domitian held his right hand outstretched in the pose of command; in his left hand he bore a figure of Minerva; his sword rested peacefully in its sheath, while his plunging steed trod upon the head of the fettered Rhine.

On the occasion of the dedication of these statues, magnificent shows were arranged for the people, and rich banquets were spread. All Rome was in a veritable tumult of pleasure. At about this time, the sages of Israel were approaching the city. From afar, they be-

came aware of the jubilation of the masses; then they stood still, and tears rushed from their eyes; Rabbi Akiba alone did not weep; a happy smile transfigured his face. And his companions said to him: "Why are you laughing, Akiba?" He in turn questioned: "Why are you weeping?" And they answered: "These pagans, who prostrate themselves before images and offer up incense to idols, who are addicted to all vicious crimes, who know nothing of the higher aims of human existence and live only for enjoyment, they pass their lives in ease and security; we, on the other hand, have seen the house of our God become a heap of ruins, have lost our national independence, are oppressed and persecuted by our enemies, and must each day tremble for the future—should we not weep?"

"Just on that account," answered Rabbi Akiba, "do I rejoice. If God shows so much kindness to those who daily and hourly violate His sacred commandments, how much blessing and reward has He reserved for His servants, whose sole striving it is to live in accordance with His holy will!"

And the sages said: "You have consoled us, Akiba, you have consoled us."

While the Romans filled the streets of the city with their shouts of merriment, the closest friends and relatives of the Emperor had been thrown into a state of terror. After the Emperor had spread a good banquet for the citizens, he proposed to follow it with a repast for a selected number of members of the highest ranks of the aristocracy. He had a chamber hung completely in black. The ceiling was black, the floor black, and the rows of stone benches that were set in order were bordered with black cloth. The guests were invited for the

evening without their servants, and each one saw next to his dining couch a column representing a tombstone; upon this was carved the name of the guest. Over it hung, from its tripod, the funereal lamp. Scarcely had the guests taken their places, when a troop of nude blackened boys entered, and went through the movements of an ominous dance. Then the blackened youths stepped before the guests and offered them, for their meal, the remains of dishes, such as the Romans are accustomed to set before the dead. Finally the Emperor himself entered, slowly and with solemn gait. He, too, sat down, had himself handed some of the remnants of food, ate thereof, and then said:

“Yes, my friends, the departed must content themselves with the remnants of edibles; such are a costly meal for the shades of those who have descended to Orcus. Know and ponder upon the fact that it is within my power in this moment to send you on the road which leads down to Orcus. I shall make use of my power against everyone who dares to doubt my divinity. My might is comparable to that of Jupiter, and with my thunderbolts I will crush any one who ventures to rebel against me.”

The Emperor arose, and, to their surprise, the guests were permitted to return to their homes. On the next day, there appeared before each one of them the slave who had served him, washed clean and clothed; he brought the silver bowls and the silver goblet which the guest had used at that ghastly meal. These and the slave who brought them were a gift from the Emperor, a recompense for the horror to which they had been exposed.

## XVI.

### THE REIGN OF TERROR.

When the Rabbis arrived in Rome, great festivities prevailed there. Domitian had introduced into Rome the Capitoline games. Poems were to be declaimed in honor of the divinities to whom the celebration was dedicated; but, instead of this, it was the Emperor himself who formed the object of this poetic homage. The best poets of the time—Martial, Statius, and Quintilian—vied with each other in extravagant eulogies. The Emperor presided over the games in person, adorned with a golden crown and a purple robe, and surrounded by priests in similar raiment. Clad thus, he distributed the prizes, which consisted of gilded wreaths of oak-foliage.

While the mob was rejoicing and the soldiers vociferously greeting the generous Emperor, terror and anxiety took possession of the senators and the patrician families of Rome. Upon the emptiest pretexts, the noblest and best of the citizens were being accused and executed. The most distinguished victims of the frightfulness of the Emperor were three men, renowned equally for their rank as for their virtue—Herennius Lenecio, Arulenus Rusticus, and Helvidius Priscus. The two first were accused of having written odes of praise to men who were displeasing to the Emperor; the third was said to have composed a poem in which there were references to the separation of the Emperor from his wife. The Empress had been convicted of immoral relations with a dancer, named Paris, whom all Rome admired. The Em-

peror thereupon had the dancer slain in the open street, and when the admirers of the handsome dancer strewed with flowers the spot which had been covered with his blood, they were arrested and sentenced to death. The unfaithful wife was sent into exile; but Domitian could not endure the separation, recalled her to him, and, as we read in the imperial decree issued on the occasion, restored her to his "holy Pulvinar" (the splendidly covered cushion-couch used by persons who received divine honors).

It can be imagined that these events called forth the scorn of the Romans. A satire appeared, and Helvidius Priscus was accused of being its author. The three accused men were sentenced to death and executed at an open session of the Senate, in the presence of the Emperor, who feasted his eyes upon their death agonies; the blood of the slain ones actually bespattered the togas of the senators. Now there followed blow upon blow. The more amiably and kindly Domitian acted towards a distinguished man, all the more surely might the latter expect his early execution. Thus he overwhelmed with evidences of favor the consul Arretinus Clemens; as the latter was being carried with him in a palanquin, he was met by one of his informers. The Emperor had the palanquin halted, called the informer, and commissioned him to invent a cause for accusation against his companion. On the following day, Arretinus was accused and executed.

Domitian's crass superstition, too, demanded many victims. If one of the many soothsayers in Rome prognosticated the imperial purple for any particular Roman, he who was mentioned in such a forecast was executed as soon as the fact became known to the Em-

peror. A cousin of Domitian, Flavius Sabinus, had been chosen consul. The herald who announced the appointment made a slip of the tongue and, instead of consul, said "Emperor." The herald's error cost Flavius Sabinus his life.

Such were the conditions in Rome when the four rabbis made their entry.

"Shall we not first," said Rabbi Joshua, "look up our friend, the philosopher Artemidorus? The philosophers, many of whom Domitian has punished with death or exile, are our natural allies."

"No," replied Rabban Gamaliel, "let us first of all go to the man who was the cause of our trip to Rome. Akiba, lead us to the home of Flavius Clemens!"

Flavius Clemens and his wife, Domitilla, received Rabbi Akiba and his companions most warmly.

"My honored friends," said Rabbi Akiba, "this is the prince of Israel, Rabban Gamaliel, the teacher and light of our people; this is my revered master, Rabbi Joshua, whose light shines as the sun; and this is my young friend and comrade, Elasar, at once the pride and hope of my people. We have obeyed the call which you sent to us through our brother Thaddeus, in order to take counsel with you as to how we, with the assistance of God, may deflect the grave catastrophe which threatens our people."

"Welcome, my friends, my teachers," said Clemens. "I address you thus because Domitilla and I are determined to accept Judaism, although Domitian punishes such an apostasy with death. We released ourselves long ago from the thrall of the gods of the Romans."

"Sir," said Rabban Gamaliel, "consider well this resolution, before you carry it out. The pious of all

nations have a share in the world to come, and if you have abjured your allegiance to the idols, keep yourselves far from murder and adultery, eat no flesh of living animals, do not blaspheme the name of God, preserve your hands clean from wrong-doing, and practise justice, there is no need of a formal conversion to Judaism in order that you may obtain a portion of eternal bliss."

While Rabban Gamaliel was speaking, Domitilla had brought in grapes and other fruit, which she placed before the rabbis.

"Pardon me," said she, "for offering you nothing else. To be sure, I have already had my house set in order in accordance with the Jewish law, but I fear that you will eat no other food at our house, because we have not yet embraced Judaism."

The rabbis sat down and ate of the fruit which Domitilla offered them.

And now Rabbi Akiba had to tell of everything that had occurred. When he recounted the death of his master, Nachum, Domitilla shed bitter tears.

"We, too, have suffered heavily," said she. "Our two sons—"

Tears choked down her voice.

"Our two promising sons," said Clemens, coming to her aid, "died in the very flower of youth. A glorious future beamed upon them. Domitian loved them and wished to adopt the elder of them, who bore his father's name."

"I do not bewail their lot," said Domitilla, who had dried her tears. "It is better to die young than to be Emperor of this vast realm. My uncle, Domitian, was one of the most kindly-disposed persons imaginable. When he became Emperor, it was his ardent desire to

benefit this boundless empire through a good, powerful regime, by wise and benevolent laws. But what a change has taken place within him! When he ascended the throne, he said: 'He who does not show the informers his detestation encourages them!' In the beginning, he acted in accordance with this basic principle; but it soon resulted that he could not dispense with the delators. Since the uprising of Sartorius Antoninus, his general in Germany, he scents conspiracies everywhere. The thought that every Roman feels himself justified to aspire to the imperial purple gives him no rest. He must court the favor of the proletariat and prepare for them costly pleasures. He must seek to maintain for himself the affection of the legionaries by means of abundant wages. The state treasury is emptied thereby, and, in order to replenish it, the provinces must suffer exactions and the wealthy citizens of Rome are led to their death under groundless pretexts, so that their possessions may fall into the hands of the treasurer. On this account, I deem the fate of my sons a happy one, because they have escaped these frightful temptations through an early demise."

"I admire the nobility of your sentiments, mistress," said Rabbi Joshua. "You deserve to be taken under the pinions of the divine majesty and to become a daughter of Israel."

"Let us speak of the purpose of our journey," said Rabban Gamaliel, "and of what we can do to turn aside from us the wrath of the Emperor."

"To alter Domitian's disposition toward the Jews," said Clemens, "does not lie in the realm of the possible. He hates the Jews, because they are the enemies of his gods, just as he hates the philosophers. Recently there has been added something else. It is said that the hand-

some dancer, Paris, who seduced the Emperor's wife, was a Jew. Nothing certain is known on this point. If he was of Jewish descent, he was certainly a renegade. But, for Domitian, this is sufficient cause to hate the Jews and persecute them to the utmost. I know only one means of saving the Jews, and this sole means is: the death of the tyrant."

Clemens had spoken in a tone of solemn conviction. Horror was depicted upon the countenances of the Jewish listeners.

"If God punishes him," said Rabban Gamaliel, "we shall greet his death as our deliverance; but our hand will not contribute towards compassing the assassination of the Emperor. The law of our God forbids the murder of even the most cruel-hearted ruler."

"The circumstances are favorable," answered Clemens. "The noblest and best of the citizens long for nothing with greater yearning than that the slaughtering sword be wrested from the hand of the tyrant. If the large Jewish community were to take up arms and raise the standard of revolt, all right-thinking men would align themselves with the Jews, and the power of Domitian would soon be at an end."

"We cannot agree with your words," interrupted Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah; "we are not permitted to take any step which would give our persecutors the pretext to annihilate us. We may make use only of lawful means to save ourselves and our people."

"I fear," replied Clemens, "that there are no lawful means of compelling a Roman Emperor to alter his resolution. Will you, when the destruction of all Israel is imminent, prove yourselves too fainthearted to oppose violence with violence?"

"God will not abandon us," said Rabbi Akiba. "We read in the Holy Scriptures: 'I have scattered you as the four winds.' Just as the world cannot do without the winds, so it cannot dispense with Israel. God will show us the way to avert the danger in a less violent manner."

"No definite decision has yet been reached," said Clemens. "We can, therefore, wait a little longer. Where have you taken up quarters?"

"We came directly to you," answered Rabban Gamaliel.

"I advise you," said Clemens, "not to live in the house of a Jew, so that you will not attract the attention of the spies of the tyrant. I shall have you introduced by my major-domo into the home of an unsuspected Roman citizen. Cocceius Nerva will joyfully permit you to dwell in one of his houses."

He signalled three times with a knocker attached to the wall; in a few moments the major-domo appeared.

"Stephanus," Clemens addressed him, "take these men into the house of my friend Cocceius Nerva and ask him, in my name, to permit them to reside in his home during the period of their sojourn in Rome."

## XVII.

### THE EMPEROR'S CAPRICE.

Marcus Cocceius Nerva received the strangers from Judaea most cordially, and directed them to their quarters in his palace. Nerva was one of the most prominent of the senators, and had twice been consul. He was already advanced in years, having passed his sixty-fourth birthday; he was, in addition, a member of the secret council of the Emperor.

During the night following the day on which Nerva had taken into his household the leaders of the Jewish nation, he was awakened from his slumbers by an imperial messenger, and summoned to appear at once before the Emperor. Terror and anxiety took possession of the aged man. Could this sudden summons in the middle of the night have any connection with the strangers in his house?

In the ante-chamber of the Emperor, he met Flavius Clemens, which confirmed his suspicions.

"Clemens," said he, "what have I done to you that you should send me people because of whom we are now to be taken to account?"

Scarcely had he finished, when Catulus hastened up.

"What has happened," he asked of the two who were already present; "have the Chatti or the Sicambra attacked the country? Have the Britons or the Dacians raised the banner of revolt?"

Not long afterwards, Junius Mauricius entered. Domitian cherished for him a particularly violent hatred; he was a brother of Arulenus Rusticus, who had been executed.

"What is going on here?" he cried. "Are we all to be put to death?"

Thus one Senator after another appeared, until all the eleven members of the secret council of state were present. Each one of them was pale with terror, and trembled from excitement. For a long time they waited in the ante-chamber. Finally the servants of the palace were seen entering and carrying an exceedingly large vat into the chamber of the Emperor. Another half-hour passed, during which the councillors of the mighty ruler almost abandoned themselves to despair. Then the imperial chamber was opened, and they were permitted to go to meet their fate. The Emperor received them with solemn countenance.

"I have had you called together, my councillors, props of my throne, men of distinction in wisdom and virtue, in order that you may reach a decision of the highest importance. Pardon my having been compelled to disturb your repose, but the matter upon which you are to deliberate permits of no delay. Behold this unusually large fish; a poor fisherman caught it off Ancona, and, out of love and devotion to me, carried it over the mountains, in order that this rare fish might adorn my table. But I possess no pot large enough to contain this monarch of the seas. The question upon which you are to take counsel is this: shall the fish be cut into pieces and served in several pots or shall a new pot be made, large enough to contain the entire fish?"

The Senators scarcely believed their ears. Full of wonderment, they looked from the mighty Emperor to the huge fish and from the huge fish to the mighty Emperor. When they were at last convinced that they had heard correctly, a feeling of relief entered their hearts, a moment before filled with anxiety. But this was followed by a feeling of rebellion, which took possession of them. The most prominent Senators of the Emperor who ruled the world, men before whom the kings of the conquered nations grovelled in the dust, could be thus abused in order to furnish a farce in accordance with a caprice of the Emperor! And yet they had to put a good face on the absurd matter. With the most consummate care, they gravely deliberated upon the problem that had been set before them, and adduced reasons for and against, as though it were a question of shielding the realm from the most imminent danger. By the decision of the majority, it was decided that the wondrous fish should not be cut to pieces, but that a new pot should actually be prepared for it.

For the heads of the Jewish nation, this farce of the Emperor had the unpleasant consequence that Nerva asked them on the next day to take up lodgings elsewhere, since he had been exposed to too much anxiety during the night that had just passed. Rabban Gamaliel and his friends now desired nothing better than to be permitted to seek shelter in the house of one of their co-religionists. Only out of regard for the wish of Clemens had they entered the house of a pagan, where the images, scattered about promiscuously, wounded their feelings. They went to the home of their friend Thaddeus, who gladly sheltered them. Now Rabbi Joshua repeated his question:

"Shall we not visit our friend, the philosopher Artemidorus?"

This time Rabban Gamaliel had no objections to offer, and the sages had themselves directed to the suburban estate on which the philosopher lived.

Seven years before this, the Emperor had banished the philosophers from Rome. He had recently renewed the statutes that had been promulgated against them. In the meantime, many of them had returned to Rome. For the most part, the philosophers of that time were Stoics. Domitian feared the teachers of wisdom and virtue in the schools, just as he was afraid of the grumbling politicians in the Senate. Both spoke the same language and made use of the same phrases; both had recourse to the same fundamental principles and the same living examples; whether the Stoic preached his lofty political doctrines from the benches of the Senate-chamber or avoided the public gaze and gave vent to his opposition in the silence of his home, he was equally an object of suspicion to the Emperor, who, in the one case, feared open hostility, and, in the other, secret intrigue. But while the politicians were punished with horrible forms of death, Domitian contented himself with merely banishing the philosophers. Some were driven to the wildest and most distant corners of the empire, to the coasts of Gaul, to the deserts of Lybia, or to the steppes of Scythia. But Artemidorus, who, to be sure, was a geographer rather than a philosopher, was exiled to an estate which he possessed just outside the city.

Artemidorus of Ephesus, who is not to be confused with the younger philosopher of the same name and the author of a work on the significance of dreams, who lived some fifty years later, is especially renowned for

his journey on the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. Five hundred years later, Marcianus of Heraklea made an abstract, still extant in part, of Artemidorus' eleven-volume work, "Periplus." The fragments of the abstract are to be found in the collections known as the "Geographi graeci minores" (Minor Greek Geographers). In the course of his travels, he visited Palestine, and had there formed a friendship with the heads of the Jewish people.

When the four rabbis had reached the country-home of the philosopher, Rabbi Joshua knocked at the door. Artemidorus heard this, and said to himself: "These must be the sages from Judea, who never entered a house without first knocking." He quickly threw off his house-robe, and clothed himself in the garments which the philosophers of the time were accustomed to wear.

"These are the sages of Israel," said the philosopher to himself; "they will not enter until I open the door for them. No other people on earth possess such decorum as these men."

Quietly he completed his toilet, and not until Rabbi Joshua had knocked for the third time did Artemidorus hasten to the door and open it. Then he saw the sages of Israel. In the middle stood Rabban Gamaliel, at his right hand, Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, and at his left, Rabbi Akiba. Artemidorus called to them:

"Welcome, sages of Israel, with Rabban Gamaliel at your head."<sup>1</sup>

He took them into his house and said:

"Praised be the God of Israel who grants me the good fortune to greet my friends here."

<sup>1</sup>Compare Tractate Derech Eretz, Chap. 5.

After the sages had seated themselves, Rabban Gamaliel spoke up:

"We, too, are happy that we are permitted to renew our friendship with you. But the cause of our journey is a very sad one. A great catastrophe threatens our people. The Emperor fears the Jews even more than he does the philosophers. He is concerned over the fact that so many of the thinking men of Rome are becoming converts to Judaism, and he has determined, in order to save the old gods of Rome, to destroy us and our co-religionists. Now, O philosopher, we have come to you, to ask your advice. What can we do to turn aside the imminent destruction?"

Artemidorus remained silent for a long time, while the sages expectantly awaited his reply.

"My friends," said the philosopher at length, "it is difficult to offer advice in this matter. Domitian knows no mercy. If you go to him and cast yourselves at his feet, he will receive you graciously, will promise you mercy and clemency, only to contrive your destruction with all the greater certainty. Deliverance lies solely in the circumstance that the measure of his iniquities is full and that his rule of frightfulness can not last much longer. Believe me, he will be overthrown and will die a disgraceful death."

"What good to us," said Rabbi Joshua, "is the death of the tyrant, if his murderous commands are first executed upon our people?"

"The only thing that you can do," replied Artemidorus, "is to attempt to obtain a delay. I am in a position to supply you with an important confederate. I shall entrust you with a secret which I learned through my father-in-law, Musonius. He told me that he learned

from one of Domitian's informers that Marcus Cocceius Nerva, one of our most distinguished senators, has been placed at the head of those who have been appointed by the Emperor to die. If the assassination of this man is being planned, no senator is sure of his life any longer. Reveal this secret to Nerva; it will speed the death of the tyrant."

## XVIII.

### THE DECREE.

When the sages had left the country-house of Artemidorus, they considered that it would not be well for them in a body, to visit the senator who, for political reasons, had asked them to leave his house. Rabbi Akiba undertook to go to him alone to inform him of the danger that threatened him.

Rabbi Akiba sent to ask the senator for a secret consultation.

"Sir," said he, when he appeared before Nerva, "you sent me and my comrades from your house in order that you might not be compromised in the eyes of the Emperor by our presence in your home. This caution was unnecessary. Domitian had already proscribed you, before we came to Rome."

Nerva started back in fright.

"Are you a prophet," he asked, "that you are able to penetrate into the secrets of the Emperor?"

"I am neither a prophet nor the disciple of a prophet," answered Rabbi Akiba. "What I have just told you is a secret which was confided to me by a friend. Musonius, the father-in-law of Artemidorus, learned it from one of the Emperor's delators."

When Nerva heard these words, he trembled; he staggered back, and Rabbi Akiba made haste to lend him support. He led him to a sofa and there seated him.

Nerva contended, with all his strength of will, against the terror which had befallen him. Then he said:

"The source from which you have received your information is a reliable one, and I do not doubt the truth of your words. Woe to me, that I must die and that the thread of my life is to be violently sundered! But tell me, O stranger, what prompts you to give me this information? I did not deserve that my life should be dear in your eyes."

"Sir, I am a Jew," answered Rabbi Akiba, "a descendant of Abraham, of whom God said: 'All the nations of the earth shall be blessed through thee.' Consequently, it is my duty to work for the welfare of all my fellow-men, as far as lies in my power. But to-day, another cause inspires me to warn you in order that you may meditate plans to protect your life against the sword of the imperial executioner. Domitian is plotting evil against us Jews; therefore, his enemies are our allies."

"And how do you think that I am able to defend my life?"

"That, sir, you must know better than I. For you have many friends, and the fate that threatens you may tomorrow overcome the others."

"You are right, stranger, I shall consider with my friends what is to be done. Ah, I had hoped to spend in peace the few days which are still allotted to me. I am an old, lonesome man, and the astrologers prognosticated that I should live only a short time longer, but that I should die peacefully in my bed."

"If the Chaldeans have foretold that, and you possess the horoscope upon which this forecast is based, this may, perhaps, save your life. Domitian is very

superstitious, and attaches firm belief to the prophecies of the soothsayers. You need only to bring this horoscope to his attention, and he will not be desirous of dipping his hands in your blood. He will prefer to have you die without his intercession, so that he will not have to challenge the hatred and the vindictiveness of your friends."

"Divine wisdom resides in you, O stranger. Your advice is excellent, and I shall follow it. If I remain alive, I shall prove myself grateful to you."

"Sir, my life hangs in just as great danger as does yours. Help us to turn aside from my people the annihilation which threatens them, and you will have bounteously paid your debt of gratitude."

"Of what use can a man be who is marked out for death?"

"Strange are the ways of Providence. The Almighty can overthrow the powerful and great in a single moment and exalt him who appears to be lost."

On that very day, the members of the state council were called before the Emperor. In accordance with his custom of being particularly amiable towards those whom he had selected as the victims of his despotism, the Emperor received Cocceius Nerva in a most friendly fashion. He approached him, and threw his arms about him.

"But, my dear Nerva," said the Emperor, "you look so dark and sombre. Can something unpleasant have happened to the closest of my friends, to him who stands nearest to my heart?"

"I must, indeed, be sad," answered Nerva, "since the stars announce my early demise."

"Your words grieve me, Nerva. Let us hope that this time the stars have erred, although they are accustomed to foretell the fates of men without deception. Has the mode of your death also been shown you?"

Nerva drew forth a tablet and handed it to the Emperor.

"Here," he said, "is the horoscope which was cast on my last birthday, at the hour of my birth."

Domitian took the tablet and examined it attentively.

"Indeed," he said, "the stars announce your early death. But your star descends gleaming and beautiful and undarkened. You will die in your bed and will enjoy, without troubles, the days which are still allotted you."

Nerva drew a breath of relief. He knew the Emperor thoroughly, and derived from his words the certainty that the tyrant had abandoned the plan of having him put to death.

In the meantime, the members of the state council had assembled. Domitian had ascended the throne; at his feet, on low cushions, sat the councillors.

"My friends," the Emperor addressed his audience, "what shall one do, when he has a painful festering sore upon his foot? Shall he permit the sore to spread until the entire body is infected by its poison and approaches sure death, or shall he cut out the sore with a sharp knife, in order to preserve his life."<sup>1</sup>

"You ask us this, O Emperor," said Junius Mauricius, "only in order to introduce something else by means of your question. For it is self-evident that one must undergo the operation, no matter how painful it may be, in order to save the entire body."

<sup>1</sup>Compare Abodah Zara, 10b.

“You have correctly comprehended the sense of my words, Junius. You all know that the religion of our fathers is in great danger. Already they are beginning in Rome to doubt the omnipotence of Jupiter, and Minerva, my gracious patroness, does not receive the adoration which is her due. I have driven from the city the philosophers, who poison the hearts of the youth through their misleading doctrines. But a powerful enemy of our gods lives in our midst and is tolerated by us. This enemy, this godless enemy, is Judaism. You know that the Jews worship no gods. In this respect, they differ from all the peoples of the earth. The gods of the Egyptians, of the Chaldeans, of the Gauls, of the Germans, and of all other nations, are like ours; there are merely different names for the same divinities. But the Jews have no gods whatsoever; for them, Jupiter does not rule the heavens, nor Neptune the seas, nor Pluto the shades; for them, Apollo does not guide the chariot of the sun nor does Diana the moon. They have no divine image to which they show reverence. They have from earliest times been enemies of the Roman empire.. My father, the divine Vespasian, overthrew them; my brother, the divine Titus, destroyed their Temple, in which they worshipped an unknown, invisible Being. Despite this, they have not ceased to be dangerous to us; they seduce my people to godlessness. Already many prominent citizens have been put to death for their inclination toward Judaism. But the contagion spreads further and further each day, and as long as we tolerate these Jews in the Roman Empire, their godlessness will work like an infectious disease. Therefore, I feel myself called to complete the work which was begun by my father and my brother. Their activity

proved ineffectual; they crushed the Jewish state and destroyed the Jewish Temple; but they permitted the Jewish people to live on. I wish to root out the entire nation and, in this way, to preserve the gods of Olympus from collapse. Not a single Jew, not a man, woman or child, of this sinful, godless race shall remain alive. Thirty days from to-day, the Senate shall decree that they all be killed, all, all, in the entire vast Roman Empire, wherever they may be living, in Rome and all Italy, in Judaea and Syria, in Egypt and Africa, in Gaul and Spain. I expect all of you to be in agreement with me and to make this decision of mine also yours."

Flavius Clemens arose.

"Caesar," he said, "permit me—"

"Be silent, Clemens," interrupted the tyrant, "it does not become you to take part in this discussion. I have been informed that you lean to the customs of the Jews, hold intercourse with them, and deny the gods the reverence due them. By Hercules, if you were not my next of kin, if I did not desire to spare Domitilla, my niece, I should long since have permitted the prosecutor to take you to account for your unholy conduct. Do not dare to utter a word in favor of the Jews, or I swear by Minerva, my sublime protectress, that you will be accused and convicted of impiety."

Flavius Clemens was silent, and panic seized the members of the secret council.

"Then all of you are in accord with me?"

"Omnipotent Emperor," interposed Nerva, "what you have said is certainly true, but—"

"Nerva," Domitian interrupted, "I should think that you would like to spend the few days that you are still

destined to live, in rest and peace! Desist, therefore, from defending the Jews."

No one else ventured to raise an objection, and so the Emperor's plan of annihilation became a formal decision. Before Domitian dismissed the members of the secret council, he said:

"Remember that you are my *secret* councillors. Whoever gives to the outside world the most meagre hint regarding the decision that has just been reached will suffer the penalty of death. Keep the secret even from your wives."

At these words, the Emperor cast a dark glance upon his nephew Clemens; for him especially was the warning of the tyrant meant.

## XIX.

### SACRIFICE.

Despite the express command of the Emperor, Flavius Clemens made haste to divulge to the Rabbis who were in Rome, the secret of the decision of the council, which was to be laid before the Senate at the expiration of thirty days. There was not the slightest prospect that the Senate would oppose the Emperor's plan. The Senators trembled for their lives, and outdid one another in submissiveness. As greedy of honors and domineering as Domitian was, he could yet scarcely do justice to the many evidences of esteem with which the Senate wished to overwhelm him upon every occasion. Only a few days before, the Senate had decreed to create for the Emperor a body-guard consisting of Roman knights; but Domitian had refused this high honor. It was, therefore, to be expected that the Senate would ratify, without any opposition, the murderous plan of the Emperor.

Despair seized upon the hearts of the leaders of the Jewish nation. Flavius Clemens consoled them.

"Fear nothing," he said, "God will not abandon you, but will send you deliverance. Was it not one Jew who, in the days of old, nullified single-handed the malicious proposal of Haman? To-day Judah counts many devout and holy men, for whose sake God will have mercy on His people."

"If we only knew," said Rabban Gamaliel, "how we could be helpful to our people! But we stand here

completely at a loss and unable to offer advice. There remains to us no other refuge but prayer to our God in Heaven."

"And repentance for our sins," said Rabbi Akiba, "and a return to Him with all our heart and all our soul, in accordance with the scriptural text: 'In your need, turn again to the Lord your God, and hearken to His voice; for the Eternal, your God, is merciful; He will not forsake nor destroy you, nor will He forget the covenant which he swore unto your fathers.'"

Flavius Clemens had not told his wife of the evil plans of the Emperor. But as he was always sad and depressed, Domitilla did not cease questioning him, until he finally revealed to her the cause of his moroseness. Both had previously embraced Judaism. Flavius Clemens had performed upon himself the act of circumcision. Twenty-five of the thirty days had already sped by, when Domitilla said to her husband:

"You must rescue the Jews, Clemens, before it is too late. Only five more days, and the Senate will sanction the decision of the Emperor, and then unspeakable misery will overtake the people of God."

"What shall I do, my beloved wife? I am utterly at a loss."

"My dear husband, beloved of my heart, it is in your power to procure at least a delay. What is this life, full of anxiety and sadness and grief? In the Beyond, a loving God has prepared indescribable bliss for His pious children. After the Emperor, you are the first in rank in the Empire. The will of the Roman people has clothed you with the consulship. If you were to die, another consul would first have to be elected, before the Senate could reach a binding decision. You

know that the preparations for the election of a consul occupy many days. Much can happen in a short time, and perhaps assistance may come for the Jewish people. Therefore, I ask you to go to the Emperor and confess to him that you have already embraced Judaism. He will sentence you to death and have you executed. From your blood will spring salvation for the Jewish people."

"Domitilla, what do you demand of me! Shall I sacrifice my life only in order to gain delay?"

"My beloved, if it were in my power, how gladly should I give up my life for such a purpose! What does this life offer us but pain and distress, since the day when death carried off the beloved of our heart, since the day when my uncle on the throne became a bloody monster? My Clemens, I deem you 'fortunate that it is granted you to win immortal life by a deed full of self-sacrifice.'"

"How shall I bear the fate of a disgraceful execution?"

"Take this ring, my beloved. In its capsule there are a few drops of poison which, when swallowed, have an immediate and fatal effect. You now have in your hands the means of escaping a shameful execution."<sup>1</sup>

On the next day, Clemens appeared before the Emperor. Domitian had surrounded himself with the most stringent precautionary measures. Even his closest friends were not admitted into his presence before it had been ascertained by a careful search that they were unarmed.

"All-powerful Caesar," Clemens addressed the Emperor, "I come to bespeak your clemency in behalf of the Jews."

<sup>1</sup>Compare *Midrash Rabba* to Deuteronomy 2, and *Yalkut* to Psalm 47.

"Be silent," exclaimed Domitian, "or your life is forfeit!"

"I do not fear death," answered Clemens, "and I will speak, even at the risk of your forgetting that I am your nearest relative and the husband of your niece. You will never succeed in exterminating the Jews. To be sure, you can bring death and destruction to a part of them; but utter annihilation you cannot achieve. The Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and earth, guards and protects them, and will not permit their being destroyed; for they are His people, whom He shelters with loving care, as the shepherd watches his sheep. Your plan of murder will not succeed; but you will conjure up destruction for yourself."

"How can these miserable Jews harm me? They are a conquered, downtrodden people, and I am the ruler of the world."

"It is not the Jews who will prove dangerous to you; but the God of the Jews, the omnipotent Creator and guide of the universe will know how to punish you, if you stretch forth a hand against the people which He has chosen from all the nations of the earth."

"Then you believe in this God and acknowledge him?"

"I believe in Him and acknowledge Him."

"I am grieved on your account, Clemens. I should not like your blood to be spilled as that of a criminal. Take back what you have just said, lest you suffer death."

"Will you give up your plans of murder against the Jews?"

"No, and again, no!"

"Then have me also killed, and grant me the favor of being permitted to sacrifice my life for the sanctification of the name of the one God!"

"You are mad, Clemens, your reason is obscured. Retract this statement and I shall elevate you to a position higher than you have ever in your fondest dreams hoped to attain. You have already reached the highest rung to which a citizen of this realm can climb. You bear the same lofty magisterial dignity as I: you are consul. But I intend to elevate you still more. You and Domitilla are my closest relatives; I have no one who stands nearer to me than you, since my only son died and I have no other prospective heirs. It is, therefore, my purpose to clothe you with the purple, to adopt you as my son, to exalt you to the rank of vice-Emperor. Withdraw what you have said, Clemens, cease your foolish twaddle about the Jews, and you shall be a god on earth."

"The dazzling prospect which you hold out to me contains nothing alluring for me. Once I cradled myself blissfully in such dreams. But since you, Domitian, have showed the world with how many crimes an Emperor is compelled to burden his soul, I have resolved to renounce so lofty a station. Moreover, my belief and my faith are not for sale. Never in my life will I prostrate myself before the Roman gods, never will I sacrifice to them. And if you were to die to-day, and the Roman people were to acclaim me, your next in kin and heir, Emperor, I should refuse the imperial purple. I strive after eternal bliss; the goods and dignities of this world hold no more charms for me."

"And Domitilla?"

"She shares my views; she herself encouraged me to appear before you and to confess to you that we have both embraced Judaism."

"You must die, Clemens."

"I know it."

"I am compelled to introduce an accusation against you into the Senate, and you will be sentenced to a miserable death."

"Caesar, Domitilla gave me this ring. In its capsule are a few drops which I need only to sip in order to escape the disgrace of a public execution. I, too, was determined to put an end to my life, through this poison, in your presence. But I have changed my mind. I shall sanctify the name of God before the eyes of the entire world. The most distant generation to come will see in me an example, and learn through me how great is the power of the truth with which I am permeated."

"You are ill, Clemens. I ask you again, for the last time, to disavow this preposterous admission. We are alone; no living being except me has heard your insane babblings and I, I shall forget them."

"I shall repeat my confession in the Senate-chamber and on the market-place, I shall shout, so that the entire world may hear, the fact that I have become a Jew, that I revere the one, invisible God, the Creator of Heaven and earth, that I despise the gods of Rome and scorn and reject those of all other nations."

Domitian opened the door and called to the sentinel who was stationed in the ante-chamber:

"Arrest this man and have him securely imprisoned; he is a prisoner deserving of capital punishment."

On the very same day, Domitian entered the Senate as the accuser of the consul, Flavius Clemens, and

charged him with apostasy to Judaism. As Clemens made no denial, he was unanimously sentenced to death. With amazement and terror, the Romans learned that Domitian had not hesitated to put to death his closest relative, the distinguished scion of the royal line, the supposed successor to the throne. Panic seized all the aristocratic Romans; but still greater were the mourning, the fright, the despair of the hard-pressed Jews, who had no suspicion of the fact that Clemens had sacrificed himself for their sake.

## XX.

### THE CONSPIRACY.

When the Rabbis of Judaea, who were in Rome, learned of the execution of Flavius Clemens, they rent their garments, seated themselves on the ground, and wept. After they had sat there in silence for a short while, Rabbi Akiba said:

"My teachers, now is not the time to sit inactive and to mourn. Perhaps we shall learn something that may be of benefit for us and our people."

"Under the present circumstances," said Rabbi Joshua, "a visit to Domitilla would be dangerous. Her house is most probably watched by spies, and everyone who enters or leaves is called to the attention of the tyrant as a suspicious character."

"Nevertheless," said Rabban Gamaliel, "we must visit the wife of him who has sacrificed his life for the glorification of the divine name, we must console and seek to strengthen her in her bitter sorrow."

When the sages came to the wife of Clemens, they found her calm and strong.

"My friends," she said, "you do not know what a noble deed Clemens actually performed for your sake. Only five days more, and all Israel was to have been destroyed. Through his death, Clemens procured a delay whereby Domitian's murderous scheme is indefinitely postponed. In the meantime, God will send His people assistance and rescue. After my beloved husband had circumcised himself, he went to the Emperor, and ac-

knowledged himself a Jew, in order, through his death, to make necessary a new consular election. He asked me to tell you that he had assumed the name Shalom and the surname Ketia, because he laid hand upon himself in order to enter into the covenant of Abraham."

"The memory of Shalom Ketia will be blessed for all time to come," said Rabban Gamaliel. "In the last verse of the forty-seventh Psalm, we read: 'The princes of the nations have gathered together to be with the people of the God of Abraham; for the shields of the earth are God's; sublime above all is He.' Once God said to Abraham, 'I shall bless you and exalt your name, and you yourself shall be a blessing; and I shall bless those that bless you, and curse him who curses you, and through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' After all these promises, God commanded Abraham to carry out upon himself the covenant of circumcision, and said to him; 'Fear not, I am your shield.' But God made no promise whatsoever to Shalom Ketia, who, nevertheless, entered into the covenant of Abraham and sacrificed his life for the rescue of the Jewish nation; he is, therefore, even greater than Abraham, and to him the following promise has reference: 'For the shields of the earth are God's'; sublime above all men is he, greater and loftier even than our father Abraham."

When Rabban Gamaliel had finished, the major-domo of Domitilla, the freedman Stephanus, rushed into the room.

"Flee hence as swiftly as you can," he called out to the sages, "for messengers of the Emperor are approaching. Follow me, I shall lead you into the open through another exit."

"Go," said Domitilla, "pray for me and for my cherished husband."

"For Shalom Ketia," said Rabban Gamaliel, "we need not pray. He has accomplished the highest that a man can perform on earth. Eternal bliss will fall to his lot, and you, mistress, will one day enter the habitation of the blessed."

"Hasten," cried Stephanus, "the messenger of the Emperor must not find you here."

The Rabbis followed their guide. Soon afterwards, the emissaries of the Emperor entered the chamber of Domitilla; they announced to her that the Emperor was actually under the obligation of having her placed on trial and sentenced to death but that he was making use of the lofty privilege of his royal authority and sparing her life; she must, however, go into exile on the island of Pandateria.

The anxiety which had seized upon the Roman senators was increased even more when one of the noblest and most aristocratic of them, the ex-consul Acilius Glabro, was accused of the crime of having once fought with wild beasts in the amphitheatre. He was sentenced to death and immediately executed. The Emperor's delators had spread over entire Rome. They knew how to slink about everywhere, under all kinds of disguises. They cursed the Emperor and his frightfulness to such an extent that they enticed the selected victim to utter the same complaints. Then the victim was denounced, accused upon the emptiest of pretexts, and executed.

All these horrors and executions finally caused a few senators to assemble at the home of Cocceius Nerva and to resolve upon the death of the Emperor. They were driven to this extreme by their concern for their own

lives. Though the danger was very great, they were not to be deterred. Yet, even if they succeeded in killing Domitian, there remained the fear that the plebeians and the soldiers, whom he had always flattered, would avenge his death. Consequently, no one wished to undertake to place upon his own shoulders the purple which would be made vacant by the assassination of the Emperor; for it was to be anticipated that the vengeance of the legions would overtake the successor to the imperial power.

When all had refused, Marcus Cocceius Nerva said:

"I am an old man, and should have preferred that younger, stronger shoulders than mine should be ready to assume the burden of ruling. But as no one wishes to risk the venture, I declare myself ready to sacrifice, in the service of the fatherland, the few days that I may still be permitted to live."

The assembled senators congratulated Nerva, and thanked him for his heroic decision. Now the plan for the assassination of the Emperor was drawn up. Like Julius Caesar before him, he was to be slain in the very midst of a session of the Senate.

But it was to come about differently. Domitian no longer trusted his own servants. He had the prefect of the palace and of the body-guard, Casperius Aelianus, arrested, and several of his informers, who had aroused his suspicions, executed. Panic overwhelmed all who were near him. Then, one day, it happened that a lad named Ganymede, upon whom the Emperor performed acts of perversion common in Rome at the time, found a tablet which the tyrant had concealed beneath his pillow. Upon it were noted the names of new victims, among them Domitia, the Emperor's own wife, and Parthenius, his most trusted servant. Ganymede showed the Empress

what he had found. She summoned Parthenius and the others who had been proscribed, and showed them the notes which Domitian had added in his own hand.

"We must anticipate him," cried Parthenius.

"Exactly," said the Empress. "But whom shall we trust with the execution?"

"Leave that to me, mistress," said Parthenius. "I know a man of great physical strength, who would deem himself fortunate to be permitted to deal the death blow. As Domitian himself is very strong and always allows only one servant near him, the one who is to liberate us must at least equal him in physical strength."

Not long afterwards, Parthenius entered the deserted house of Flavius Clemens and expressed the desire to speak with Stephanus, the major-domo. As the latter was not at hand, Parthenius remained to await his return.

Stephanus had gone to the lodgings of the Jewish sages.

"I bring you here," he said to them, "my master's last will and testament. Before his visit to the Emperor, he entrusted to me this packet, saying: 'Stephanus, you have been a faithful servant to me; I pray you, fulfill my last wish. If I do not return from this visit, bring it to the sages from Judaea, and tell them that it shall be the property of Akiba and his comrades.'"

Without awaiting the reply of the sages, Stephanus departed. Rabbi Akiba opened the packet, and found in it jewels and pearls of almost priceless value.

When Stephanus returned to the house of his master and found Parthenius waiting for him, he exclaimed:

"Well, Parthenius, have you come to lead me, too, to my death?"

"No," replied Parthenius, "I have come to give you the opportunity of avenging the death of your master."

"I do not wish to avenge my master's death. My master received only the punishment which he deserved, and my beloved mistress has been spared by the grace of the Emperor. I am very well disposed toward Domitian, and I offer a sacrifice daily to Minerva, supplicating her graciously to protect him."

"You are very clever, Stephanus, and I have nothing but praise for your foresight; but I beg of you, read what Domitian has written upon this tablet in his own hand; you know the handwriting of the Emperor."

Stephanus took the tablet and read.

"To be sure," he said, "that alters conditions. Give me your hand, Parthenius, we are confederates."

"Good," said Parthenius, extending his hand, "I seize this hand and dedicate it to the best and noblest deed that a Roman has ever performed. This hand shall prevent the raging tyrant from shedding more of the blood of the leading citizens of the state."

"Why have you selected me for this, Parthenius?"

"Because Domitian possesses great physical strength and because you are the only one, of all those whom I can take into my confidence, who is his superior in this respect."

"What is your plan?"

"You must offer to enter the service of the Emperor. He knows you and is attached to you. He will bear no suspicion against you and will not fear that you wish to avenge your master, because he does not believe in faithfulness and integrity. But you will draw the dagger which you will carry concealed under your cloak, and will thrust it into his accursed heart. Jupiter will lend

strength to your arm, and will send the thrust home. All the gods have abandoned the tyrant. Last night, he dreamed that Jupiter, the protector of the Empire, had forbidden his daughter Minerva any longer to shield the destroyer of the Empire, the despotic Domitian. The auspices are favorable. It is for you, Stephanus, to see to it that they are soon fulfilled."

"I need no further admonition. The shades of my beloved master shall be avenged."

## XXI.

### DELIVERANCE.

Time passed, all too swiftly for the anxious Jews. On the days preceding the New Year, they had all prayed with redoubled fervor to God; on New Year's day the sound of the Shofar had penetrated their hearts. The election of the new Consul, who was to take the place made vacant by the execution of Clemens, was set for the eighteenth day of September. On the same day, the decree of the Emperor against all the Jews of the Empire was to be laid before the Senate for ratification. The Christians, too, were included, for, at that time, they were still considered a Jewish sect; they were also to be sacrificed, without exception. In that year, the Day of Atonement fell upon the eighteenth of September. It can readily be imagined with what fervent devotion the Roman Jews prayed to the Almighty, how they repented of their sins. Our sages tell us, in the Midrash, that the promise of the Scriptures was fulfilled during these days; for we read (Deuteronomy 4, 30): "In thy distress—thou wilt return to the Lord thy God, and hearken to His voice."

In colonial Agrippina, the Cologne of our day, a soothsayer, named Mardonius, had prophesied that the Emperor would be assassinated on the eighteenth of September, at the beginning of the fifth hour of the afternoon. He had been brought in chains to Rome, tried there, and sentenced to death. Then the soothsayer laughed and said: "You can sentence me to any death

that you please. My fate will be a different one. Mardonius will not die at the hand of the executioner, but will be torn to pieces by dogs." To show that he was a false prophet, the Emperor ordered a stake to be erected and the soothsayer to be thrown into the flames.

The command of the Emperor was immediately carried out. Domitian himself was present when the sentence was executed. A smile of relief flitted over his face as the unfortunate man was cast into the leaping flames. At the very same moment, a frightful storm broke out, rain fell in torrents, extinguished the fire, and the half-consumed soothsayer escaped the stake with his life. At the foot of it he collapsed, too weak to go any further. Just then several dogs ran up, and tore to pieces the dying man. Domitian beheld this, and his heart trembled with deadly fear.

"Alas!" he exclaimed, "if the wretch foretold the truth concerning himself, what he predicted about the ruler of the world will also come true."

The Emperor spent the succeeding days and nights in an agony of terror. Finally, the eighteenth of September arrived.

"To-day," said Domitian, "something will occur which will become the subject of conversation all over the world."

He had a sore on his forehead from which he squeezed a drop of blood, and sighed: "If only this were all!"

The fifth hour arrived, without anything happening; when it was past, an insane joy took possession of the Emperor. He demanded that a bath be prepared for him and that he be clothed for the evening meal.

Scarcely had this been done when Stephanus entered the chamber of the Emperor.

"What do you desire, Stephanus?" asked the Emperor.

"Mighty Caesar," answered Stephanus, "I no sooner enter your service than I approach you with a request."

"Nothing concerning Domitilla, I hope," said the Emperor.

"No," replied Stephanus, "it concerns your own person, O favorite of the gods, pride of the Roman people!"

At these words, he handed the Emperor a document which Domitian took and began to read. At this, Stephanus drew from the sleeve of his cloak a dagger, and struck the Emperor with all his might. As he had not been severely wounded, Domitian grasped for his own weapon, but found that the sword had been removed from its sheath. Thereupon, he seized the dagger of the assassin, cutting his own fingers to the very bone; then he tried to gouge out the eyes of Stephanus with his bleeding fingers, and beat him upon the head with a golden goblet, all the while screaming for help. It was a horrible struggle and, despite his powerful physique, Stephanus would have succumbed, had not, at this moment, Parthenius, Maximus, and other conspirators come to his assistance. They attacked the desperately struggling, bleeding Emperor with their daggers, until he fell to the floor in a heap. It was high time. Domitian was still living when his faithful legionaries were attracted by his piercing shrieks, and rushed in with bared swords.

To their horror, they saw their master lying on the floor in a dying condition.

"Who did this?" one of them shouted.

The dying Emperor summoned all his remaining strength and croaked: "Stephanus!"

The legionaries attacked Stephanus with their swords, while the other conspirators hastened away as quickly as they could. Stephanus was cut to pieces, and thus the Emperor and his slayer died together.

Swift as the winds, the report of the murder of the Emperor flew about. The Senators were assembled in the Curia and greeted the fall of the tyrant with noisy shouts of acclamation. The fathers of the people heaped curses and maledictions upon the head of the murdered Emperor, placed ladders upon the walls, and tore down his trophies and his likenesses. After the first outburst of joy had calmed down, they hastened to bestow the royal power upon Senator Marcus Cocceius Nerva.

The Jews were still in the synagogue. The Day of Atonement was approaching its close, when, suddenly, the rumor of the death of the tyrant was circulated. Thereupon, Rabban Gamaliel threw himself upon the ground and exclaimed: "The Eternal is God, the Eternal is God." The whole congregation followed his example, and the synagogue trembled with the joyous exclamations of those who had been snatched from death.

Happiness prevailed in Rome. The city had been filled to overflowing with images of the assassinated Emperor; all of these were delivered to destruction; those of marble were pounded to dust, those of gold, silver, or bronze melted, among them the majestic colossus in the Forum. Domitian's name was erased from every monument; his triumphal arches, together with the Janus-arches with which he had adorned the streets, were pulled down.

In the meantime, the corpse of the murdered world-ruler remained lying, unheeded, on the spot on which the Emperor had fallen. There was no one who was willing to pay him the last honors,—neither his wife Domitia, nor any of the numerous manumitted informers whom he had laden with wealth and dignities, not a single one of all the sycophants who had worshipped him as a god. And so, the corpse lay there, putrefying and filling the palace with stench, until Phyllis, the old nurse of the Emperor, the only one who remained faithful to him even after his death, took hold of him, burned the corpse, and placed the ashes in the temple of the Flavii next to the urn of Julia, the daughter of Titus.

But the newly-chosen Emperor could not rejoice in his rise to imperial dignity. The praetorian guards revolted and angrily demanded revenge for the blood of the deceased Emperor. Parthenius and Maximus were killed by them. Culpurnius Crassus, a descendant of the renowned triumvir, laid claim to the imperial purple. Only with difficulty were these uprisings suppressed.

When Nerva had at last procured peace, there began a reign of mildness and clemency. The bloody laws which Domitian had enacted were repealed and the exiles recalled to Rome. This recall came too late for Domitilla. She had already succumbed, on the island of Pandeteria, to the grief consequent upon the death of her beloved husband.

The new Emperor summoned the sages from Judaea into his presence, and received them very amiably.

"I am now in a position," he said, "to recompense you for the kindness you showed me. I shall always be a gracious ruler to the Jews."

At these words he handed them a coin. On its obverse was the image of the Emperor, on its reverse a palm-tree as the symbol of Judaism, with the inscription: "The libels upon the Jews have been withdrawn" (*Fisci judaici calumnia sublata*).

The Rabbis thanked the Emperor, and Rabban Gamaliel handed him, in his turn, an apology, in which all the accusations against Judaism were refuted. Then the Rabbis blessed the Emperor and departed.

Although the winter was approaching, the sages could not be persuaded to await a more propitious season for sailing. They longed for their country and their accustomed educational activity. Therefore, they journeyed to Brundisium, and embarked upon a ship that was awaiting them there. But the passage proved very stormy. The ship was driven from its course, and the food-supplies which they had brought with them were scarcely sufficient for the lengthened trip. Moreover, the tithe for the Levites and the tithe for the poor (it was the third of the seven years of the shemitah-cycle) had to be deducted. Then Rabban Gamaliel said:

"I shall deduct the levitical tithe of the food which we have here from that which I have at home; that I hand over to you, Joshua, since you are a Levite, and the place where the grain grows is hired to you; the same I shall do with reference to the eleemosynary tithe, which I shall deduct at home. This I hand over to you, Akiba, as the head of the poor-relief, and the place where it lies is hired to you."

In a similar manner, Rabbi Joshua made over to Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, who was a descendant of Aaron, the priestly tenth of the levitical tithe which had been transferred to him.

Now the sages could enjoy all the provisions which they had brought with them, and these lasted until they reached the harbor of Jaffa.

It was towards evening of a Friday afternoon when the ship approached land.

"It will be the Sabbath," said Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, "before we reach the harbor and we shall not be permitted to leave the ship."

"Not at all," replied Rabban Gamaliel, "it is still daylight, and we are within the sabbatical limits. We are not two thousand paces from land. Even though the ship does not land before it is night, we may, nevertheless, disembark. But now, my friends, follow me into the hold."

"Why," asked Rabbi Elasar, "should we not remain on deck? My eyes drink in ecstatically the view of the Holy Land."

Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua had already left the deck. But Rabbi Akiba said:

"Come, brother Elasar. If we wish to disembark to-day, we must not tarry here. As soon as the ship lands—and it will then be Sabbath—the crew will lay down a gang-plank whereby we can reach land from the ship. If this gang-plank were put down for our sake, we could not make use of it on the Sabbath. But as the crew uses it for itself, we, too, may leave the ship over it."

"But why should we leave the deck?" asked Rabbi Elasar.

"Because," answered Rabbi Akiba, "if the gang-plank is put down in our presence, that would be just as much as though it were made for us. But if we remain at a distance, as though we were in no haste whatsoever

to leave the ship, then the crew lays down the gang-plank entirely for itself, and we are permitted to use it."

At these words they had reached the hold, so that Rabban Gamaliel heard the end of Rabbi Akiba's explanation.

"You have guessed my thoughts, Akiba," he said. "Only if the captain has the gang-plank put down when we are not present may we make use of it to leave the ship."

And so it was. Intoxicated with joy, Rabban Gamaliel and his comrades trod once more the soil of the Holy Land.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Compare Tosephta, Sabbath, Chap. 14.

## XXII.

### AN EXTRAORDINARY MISSION.

Happiness reigned in the land of Judea when the sages returned with the welcome news that the tyrant had died and that there was a new ruler at the head of the Roman Empire who wished to be a kind master and protector of the Jews. The sages resumed their lectures; for it was now a question of employing the period of peace and calm in order to introduce perfect clarity into the oral tradition and to explain and elucidate many contradictory traditions.

We must take the occasion here to set forth, in some detail, how such contradictory traditions could arise.

When the Almighty revealed Himself to His people on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the entire Torah, which contained six hundred and thirteen precepts—two hundred and forty-eight of them positive commandments, and three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments or prohibitions; for each one of these, God gave our master Moses verbal explanations. These Moses handed down to Joshua; from him they passed to the elders, then to the prophets, then to the members of the great synod, then to the men who always stood in twos at the head of Israel and are known as “pairs” (Zugoth). The last of these pairs was made up of the two celebrated teachers, Hillel and Shammai. Both had founded schools which very frequently opposed each other in their interpretations of the law. How had these different interpretations arisen? Our sages tell us that during the thirty days which Israel

spent in mourning and lamentation over the demise of our peerless master, Moses, a considerable number of oral traditions had been forgotten, but that Othniel ben Kenaz, who later became the first Judge in Israel, restored them through his keen reasoning. Thus tradition went hand in hand with logical deduction. Whenever a grave doubt arose over one of the traditions, the Jewish sages did not rest content until they had cleared up the disputed point and ascertained the correct religious precept. Thus, for instance, there had been a question, in the time of the Judges, whether the exclusion of the Ammonites and the Moabites was meant to cover only the male members of these two nations, or whether it included the females. It was for this reason that the cousin of Boaz refused to marry a Moabitess, Ruth, who had become converted to Judaism, and Boaz, too, was in doubt. Indeed, as our sages tell us in the Midrash, even Jesse, the grandson of Ruth and the father of David, was tormented by the apprehension that his descent was perhaps illegitimate. It was only the authority of the prophet Samuel that finally succeeded in establishing irrefutably that the exclusion of the Ammonites and Moabites affected only the men, and not the women who were descended from these nations.

Nothing was so calculated to produce a dangerous schism in Israel as a fundamental difference of opinion with regard to the laws relating to marriage. Such a difference existed between the schools of Shammai and Hillel. If anyone dies childless, his brother is obligated to marry the widow of the deceased husband or to go through the ceremony of Chaliza.<sup>1</sup> But if the widow

<sup>1</sup>In Jewish communities of our day, Chaliza must always be substituted for marriage with the brother-in-law.

is closely related to the brother-in-law, for example, the sister of his wife, neither marriage nor Chaliza takes place; in those days, when polygamy was permitted, this was also the case with reference to the other wives of the deceased brother-in-law. If, for instance, a man had two wives, one of them a total stranger to him before their marriage and the other the daughter of his brother, upon the death of this man, the brother, who of course, could not marry his own daughter, was not obligated to marry the other wife, either. This was the opinion of the school of Hillel; the school of Shammai, however, declared that such a man, though he could not marry his daughter, must marry the other wife of his deceased brother. Long since, the law had been fixed in accordance with the opinion of Hillel. Then the rumor spread that one of the oldest and most trustworthy of the sages, Rabbi Dosa ben Hyrcanus, had handed down a decision based upon the opinion of the school of Shammai. Rabbi Dosa was already very old, and he had become blind. It was, therefore, impossible to summon him to Jabneh and to challenge him to justify or abandon his dissenting opinion. On the other hand, the authority of the great man was generally recognized. As a result, Rabban Gamaliel decided to send a deputation to take him to task. Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Akiba offered to act as a commission to carry out this difficult errand.

When they began their journey, Rabbi Elasar and Rabbi Akiba were very much concerned as to the outcome of this unpleasant task. What means did they have of persuading the hoary, revered rabbi to give up his dissenting opinion?

"Do not be troubled, friends," Rabbi Joshua comforted them, "things will go better than you expect. I once had a much more difficult task to perform, and I was alone. When my great teacher, Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, was still living, the report spread of unheard-of things that were said to have taken place in Antipras. A wealthy, aristocratic, yet learned man, Simeon by name, dwelt there. He, so it was said, kept open house, as our father Abraham had done in olden times. Every stranger could receive at his house meat, drink, and lodging, and was treated and served in princely fashion. But as soon as the stranger, amid words of heartfelt gratitude, wished to take leave, Simeon would nod to his servants. These would seize the guest, tie him to a beam, and thrash him mercilessly. Thus people related.

"My son Joshua, said my teacher to me, 'I, the prince of Israel, may not permit such disgraceful acts. Journey to Antipras, and find out, to your complete satisfaction, whether there is any truth in the rumor.'

"Now that was an unpleasant task. Did I not have to expose myself to the danger of being roughly handled by the servants of Simeon? I arrived at Antipras, and was directed to the home of Simeon, a veritable palace.

"In the doorway, I was met by the proprietor himself, who greeted me very cordially. A beautiful room was set apart as my lodgings, and a royal banquet was prepared, at which I was seated next to the master of the house. I was hungry and eagerly attacked the costly viands and excellent wines. After dinner, my host and I, for a long time, discussed our Divine teachings, and I learned to know him as a devout, scholarly and high-minded man. Nevertheless, I did not dare to speak of my commission, for there was something energetic in

Simeon's face that made me dread to awaken in him the ferocity that was seemingly slumbering. During the night I was tortured by the most gruesome dreams; it seemed to me that I was constantly being seized by Simeon's servants and being soundly thrashed.

"On the next morning I attended the synagogue with my host, after which we took breakfast together. Now the hour of parting had come, and I trembled in anticipation of the awaited mistreatment. But nothing of the kind happened. Simeon returned my thanks, and offered to accompany me part of the way.

" 'Let's go through my garden,' he said, 'this will be a short cut.' It was a beautiful garden, almost a park. 'Aha,' thought I, 'the servants who are to waylay me are concealed at the end of the garden, in the obscurity of the forest.' But I reached the highway unmolested, and Simeon accompanied me still farther. 'I thank you again,' said I, 'but I cannot permit you to put yourself out any further on my account.' 'Thanks for your visit,' replied Simeon. Then he embraced and kissed me, and we parted.

"As I was walking away, the thought came to me that I had not fulfilled my commission. Simeon had shown consideration for me only because he esteemed me as a learned man (Talmid Chacham). I, therefore, turned around and cried: 'Rabbi, rabbi.' When Simeon turned about, I hastened to meet him. 'Rabbi', I said, 'my visit at your home was not due to mere chance; I was sent by my teacher, Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, the prince of Israel, to ask you whether it is true that you permit your guests, whom you entertain hospitably, to be whipped when they are about to take their departure.'

" 'Yes,' said Simeon, 'I have often done that,'

“ ‘Then why did you spare me?’ I asked.

“ ‘Rabbi,’ he replied, ‘you ate and drank your fill at my house; but when you were satisfied, you took nothing more, despite all my coaxing. Foolish people do not act thus. They refuse to eat and to drink, and when they are urged, they swear that they cannot take anything more, but afterwards they eat and drink in spite of their oath. These I cause to be thrashed before they leave, so that they may atone for their sin of perjury.’

“ ‘You are quite right,’ I answered, ‘and if other people of this kind should come to your house, I beg of you, give them two thrashings, one for their sin of perjury and one for the anxiety that I suffered on their account’.”

The sages reached the home of Rabbi Dosa. At the door they were met by a maid who announced Rabbi Joshua and his comrades. When they entered, Rabbi Dosa ordered the maid to place a chair for Rabbi Joshua. Rabbi Joshua seated himself and said: “Rabbi, permit another of your scholars to sit down.” “Who is that?” asked the master of the house. “Elasar, the son of Azariah.” “Ah, has my old friend Azariah left behind a son, who is distinguished in the study of the law? Then the promise of David is fulfilled. ‘I have been young and I have grown old, and I have never seen a pious man abandoned or his offspring seeking bread.’” “Rabbi,” said Rabbi Joshua, “permit a third of your scholars to sit down.” “Who is this one?” asked Rabbi Dosa. “Akiba ben Joseph.” “Ah,” cried Rabbi Dosa joyfully, “you are Akiba ben Joseph, whose fame has spread from one end of the world to the other. Sit down, my son, may there be many like you in Israel.”

The sages now began to discuss the Torah with their host, until they turned the conversation to the case of a man who has two wives, one his niece and the other unrelated to him before marriage. And they asked him: "What happens if such a man dies and leaves a brother?" To which he answered: "It is a controversy between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel." "How do we decide?" "According to the opinion of the school of Hillel." "But we have been told that you have handed down an opinion in harmony with that of the school of Shammai." "Did you hear that Dosa handed down such a decision, or ben Hyrcanus?" "We cannot say definitely." "Then know that I have a younger brother, named Jonathan, who is an extremely keen reasoner; he belongs to the school of Shammai, and he teaches that a man is permitted to marry the second wife of the husband of his daughter. But I call upon Heaven and earth to testify that the prophet Haggai sat on this mortar and taught that such a marriage is illegal. Now return and establish this ruling. But take care that you do not meet my brother and let him shatter, by his keenness, the law which has thus been determined."

The sages left the house by three different exits. Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Elasar escaped without mishap; but Rabbi Akiba was intercepted by Jonathan. For a long time the two disputed; Jonathan remained unconvinced.

"Are you Akiba," he asked, "whose fame has spread from one end of the world to the other? It is well for you that you have the good fortune to be renowned. You do not even equal an ox-herd for cleverness."

"Not even a shepherd," answered Rabbi Akiba modestly.

## XXIII.

### JEWISH CHRISTIANS.

The foremost teacher in Israel at that time was Rabbi Elieser ben Hyrcanus, whom we have already had frequent occasion to mention. Once when Rabbi Joshua entered the school at Lydda, where Rabbi Elieser was accustomed to teach, he kissed the stone which served as Rabbi Elieser's seat and said: "This stone resembles Mount Sinai, and he who is accustomed to sit on it is like the holy ark of the testimony." It can readily be imagined what excitement was aroused when Rabbi Elieser was suddenly taken prisoner by the Roman authorities and accused of having secretly embraced Christianity.

To make this strange accusation comprehensible, we must cast a glance upon the historical events of the time.

Emperor Nerva, who had distinguished himself by his clemency and friendliness toward the Jews, had adopted as son and vice-Emperor, because he himself was childless, the general, Marcus Ulpius Trajan, who was in command of the troops on the banks of the Rhine. When, soon after, Nerva died, Trajan became sole ruler of the vast Roman world-empire.

Trajan was a Spaniard by birth. His father had won manly laurels in the Jewish war, under Emperor Vespasian, having, in particular, conquered the strong Jewish fortress at Jaffa. This fortress was protected not only by its natural situation but also by earth-works

that had been constructed by the Jews. In order to take Jaffa, the father of the future Emperor, at that time commander of the tenth legion, was sent with two thousand infantrymen and one thousand cavalrymen. All the inhabitants of Jaffa who were able to bear arms, advanced to meet the enemy; but the Romans put them to flight, and the fugitives could not prevent the enemy from penetrating the outer city-gate. The inhabitants who had remained within Jaffa closed the inner gates of the city. A frightful slaughter ensued between the two walls; all the Jews who had advanced from the city, two thousand in number, were slain; because of the stubborn resistance of these men, an even greater number of Romans fell, so that more than four thousand corpses covered the space between the two walls.

Trajan now turned to the general for reinforcements. The latter sent his son Titus with five hundred cavalrymen and one thousand infantrymen. The Romans set up assault-ladders, drove the Jews from the walls after a brief defence, and Titus and his comrades leaped down into the city. But now another bloody struggle developed in the narrow streets, which had to be taken inch by inch, while the men threw down upon the enemy, from the roofs of the houses, whatever they could lay hands on. The conflict lasted until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when the brave defenders were overpowered. The old men and the youths below military age, were now cut down, some in the open squares, others in their very homes. After the annihilation of the men, only the women remained; these, together with their children, were carried off into slavery. Altogether, fifteen thousand people were killed and two thousand, one hundred and thirty taken prisoners.

As a sixteen-year-old lad, Trajan had witnessed this blood-curdling holocaust, and had become acquainted with the heroic bravery of the Jews. To be sure, they were not friendly recollections which this man, whom Roman authors laud as their best and noblest Emperor, preserved with regard to the Jews, when, at the age of forty-five, he ascended the throne of the mighty realm. In point of fact, the reign of Trajan inflicted upon the Jewish nation unspeakable woes. But we are now concerned with the Emperor's regulations against Christianity.

The Christian communities were secret societies, whose purpose was neither known nor officially recognized by the government. Consequently, conversion to Christianity was considered a capital crime. The larger part of the Christians consisted at that time of Jews, the so-called Jewish Christians, who had become proselytes to Christianity. In contradistinction to the so-called heathen Christians, these men adhered strictly to the laws of Judaism, observed the Sabbath, the holidays and the dietary laws, and circumcized their children. The leader and founder of this sect was the apostle James, the younger of this name, the son of Alpha, a native of the village of Sekonia, which lay between Sepphoris and Acco.

Rabbi Elieser was immured in the prison in which those who were sentenced to death had to assume their temporary quarters. When he was led before the judge, the latter said: "Is it possible that a wise man like you should occupy his time with such foolish things!" Rabbi Elieser answered: "I praise the true Judge!" He had meant his Father in Heaven; but the Roman judge believed himself to have been thus designated, and he said:

"Since you acknowledge me as a just judge, I release you."

When Rabbi Elieser returned to his house, he was utterly disconsolate because of the fact that such a thing could have happened to him; namely, that he could have been suspected of being a clandestine Christian. His scholars assembled about him to console him. But he refused to listen to their words of comfort.

"How can I have deserved or brought it about," he said, "that such an accusation could take root against me!"

"My master," said Rabbi Akiba, "permit me to mention something that you taught me."

"Speak," said Rabbi Elieser.

"Perhaps," said Rabbi Akiba, "something occurred to you in connection with the founders of that sect, that pleased you, and for this reason you have fallen into the suspicion of being one of them."

"Indeed," replied Rabbi Elieser, "you have reminded me, Akiba. Once I was walking through the upper market-place of Sepphoris, when I was met by a scholar of the founder of that sect, Jacob of Sekonia by name, who explained me a law on the authority of his teacher. The explanation pleased me, and I was rejoiced. I transgressed thereby the commandment: 'Keep at a distance from it,' which according to the sages, refers to all doctrines which disagree with true Judaism, and for that reason, I was suspected."

If we examine more closely the relation of the Jewish Christians of that time to the Jews, we shall see that the above-mentioned occurrence was of greatest significance. The pupils and adherents of the founder of Christianity were distinguished from the Jews only in faith. As we

have seen, they associated with the Jews and discussed legal interpretations on the authority of their master; they visited the synagogues, and the apostles even preached there. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that many Jews, including men of prominence, were converted to the new sect. Thus, we are told in the Midrash to Ecclesiastes, that Chanina, the nephew of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, almost became an apostate, but was rescued by his uncle; yet Chanina was one of the foremost men of his day, since it is reported that, when he later removed to Babylonia, he did not leave his equal in the Holy Land. Other instances are recounted in the Midrash to Ecclesiastes of the danger such close association with the newly-risen sect occasioned even to celebrated men. It was, therefore, of the greatest importance that Rabbi Akiba had caused Rabbi Elieser to confess that he had done wrong in discussing the law with a man who was already completely outside the pale of Judaism.

While Rabbi Elieser was still speaking with his scholars, a handsome youth entered, whose costume identified him as an aristocratic Roman.

"Pardon me, Rabbi," he said, "for visiting you here; I saw you today at the Pro-Consul's. It was then that I had the idea of seeking instruction from you. My name is Aquila; I am closely related to the Emperor. I was educated by a pedagogue whom the Emperor's father brought to my father's home from the Jewish war. From him I learned the Hebrew language, and, since then, I have busied myself considerably with your Torah; I have learned that one God created the world and chose Israel as His people. I should like to join your people; but tell me one thing, Rabbi. In Deuteronomy X, 17 and 18, we read: 'For the Lord your God is the God of

gods and the Lord of lords, the great, powerful, terrible God, who makes no distinction between men and takes no bribe, who obtains justice for the widow and orphan, and loves the stranger and gives him food and raiment.' Now tell me, Rabbi, is this the love that God shows the stranger, that he holds out to him the prospect of obtaining food and raiment? Truly, when I wish to reward my slaves, I promise them peacocks and pheasants!"

At this, Rabbi Elieser waxed indignant, and said:

"We need no proselytes, and certainly not such as are dissatisfied with what our father Jacob was content to ask for himself, food to eat and clothing to wear."

Aquila departed in sorrow. But Rabbi Akiba overtook him and said to him:

"Would you not like to lay your question before another of our teachers?"

"Yes," answered Aquila, "lead and I shall follow."

Rabbi Akiba led him to Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, before whom Aquila repeated his question.

"My son," said Rabbi Joshua, "if a stranger attaches himself to Judaism from pure motives and as a result of conviction that he has gained, he may become great in the Torah, which is the bread which God feeds us, and he will someday be permitted to wrap himself in the garments of salvation with which God clothes us in the coming world; he can marry his daughter, born in the Jewish faith, to a priest, and his grandson can become the High Priest, who wears the holy priestly garments, and offers sacrifices upon the altar, which are, likewise, the bread of our God."

"Thanks, Rabbi," said Aquila, "for this explanation of yours, and permit me, under your guidance, to study the teachings of the one God."

But Rabbi Akiba said:

“In you, my master, has been fulfilled the dictum of the wise King Solomon, ‘The patient man is better than a hero.’ Without your patience, Aquila would have been estranged from Judaism.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Compare *Kohemoth Rabba*, section 7; but the text, distorted by mistakes, must be corrected by comparison with *Bereshith Rabba*, section 70.

## XXIV.

### AUTHORITY.

"The words of the wise are like goads ; the utterances of the masters of assemblies like nails hammered in ; all descend from one shepherd" (Ecclesiastes XII, 11).

The sages remark, in connection with this utterance of the wise king : "The leaders of assemblies, these are the teachers of Israel, who gather together the religious precepts of the oral tradition. It sometimes occurs that some declare unclean what others consider clean, that some hold that a particular vessel cannot be used, while others assert the contrary. But that need not confuse you ; even the contradictory utterances spring from one shepherd ; one God gave them all, one leader spoke them, and he received them from the mouth of the Lord of all creatures, praised be He. For we read : 'God uttered all these words.' Bring to me an understanding heart, in order that you may be able to comprehend even what is apparently self-contradictory."

The sages tell us that when our great master, Moses, shortly before his death, took leave of his faithful pupil Joshua, he said : "My son Joshua, the time has come when I am to be taken away from you. If you have anything to ask of me, do so now." "My master Moses," answered Joshua, "I have not departed for an instant from the tent of the Torah, and you have handed over to me the entire Law ; you have explained everything to me so thoroughly that no doubts have remained in my mind."

When Moses died, all Israel mourned him for thirty days. During the period of lamentation and deep sorrow, the study of the Torah was neglected, and a whole series of religious precepts forgotten. But even though individual details did escape the leader and teacher of Israel, Joshua, the general principles had remained, whereby mental acuteness was able to restore the single precepts. Thus it has been with Israel for thousands of years. The keenness of the understanding procures advice, for all individual cases, from what has previously been established. But, as a result it was inevitable that the interpretation of many of the minutiae should arouse differences of opinion. With one man, a certain detail is important, with another, another. Thus, even in the earliest times, controversies arose over some of the minor precepts lasting until men of great authority had won over to their side the majority of the sages, and then definitely established the law.

Once there occurred a difference of opinion between Rabbi Elieser and his colleagues at Jabneh. There was a dispute concerning the oven technically styled the "serpent-oven." Rabbi Elieser likened it to a building and consequently, taught that this oven was not susceptible to ritual uncleanness; his colleagues compared it to an earthen vessel and taught, therefore, that it could become unclean. A lively debate ensued, in the course of which, despite the keenest and most thoroughly logical proof, Rabbi Elieser could not persuade his companions to accept his opinion. Then Rabbi Elieser said: "If my authority is not sufficient for you, let carob, the locust-bean tree, decide."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The interpretation, given here, of the Talmudic account, is taken from the commentaries of Rabbi Meir Schiff.

Carob was the name that had been given to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, one of the foremost men of that day. He, too, had been a pupil of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai; he led a holy life, and his prayers were often answered by God in wondrous wise. So great was his renown that once, when the son of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai lay ill, the perplexed father sent for his pupil, Rabbi Chanina, and requested him to pray for his sick son. God heard Chanina's entreaty, and the invalid recovered.

Rabbi Chanina was very poor, and he lived solely from the fruit of the locust-bean trees, the carob, which grows wild, and which may be procured gratuitously in the Orient. It was for this reason that he had been given the epithet "Carob." Rabbi Elieser had him summoned, and this celebrated master decided as his friend and former fellow-student had done. But the colleagues of Rabbi Elieser were not convinced even by this. Then he said: "If our authority is not sufficient for you, let 'the Source' decide."

The 'Source' was the epithet that had been bestowed upon Rabbi Elasar ben Arach, another of the most distinguished men of the time. His teacher, Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, had likened him to a bubbling spring which becomes a mighty stream; Rabban Jochanan had given his utterances precedence over those of his comrades; of him the master had said: "If all the sages of Israel should be weighed, including even Elieser ben Hyrcanus, Elasar ben Arach would outweigh them all." When Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai had died, Rabbi Elasar had gone to his wife at Emmaus in the expectation that his colleagues would follow him thither; for he believed that he was indispensable to them. But they did not follow him. When he then wished to remove to Jabneh, his

wife, who was excessively proud of her renowned husband, would not consent, because she believed that to do so would be a humiliation for her revered spouse. Thus, Rabbi Elasar had long absented himself from the gatherings at Jabneh. Now Rabbi Elieser had him summoned, and he, too, decided as his friend and former fellow-student had done. But, despite this, the sages were not to be budged from their previous opinion.

Then Rabbi Elieser said: "If you must actually have a majority for my opinion, let the walls of the academy decide."

Who are the walls of the academy? They are the pupils, the future teachers, who support the buildings of the academy, and upon whom the academy rests.

The pupils who were present arose to cast their vote for the most celebrated teacher in Israel. But Rabbi Joshua shouted to them and said: "You have not yet attained sufficient maturity of mind for your vote to have any weight." They remained silent, and did not venture to take part in the decision.

Then Rabbi Elieser arose and said:

"May Heaven decide between me and you!"

God heard the prayer of Rabbi Elieser and sent the prophet Elijah to address the sages: "Why do you contend with Rabbi Elieser? He is always right."

But Rabbi Joshua arose and said: "We read in the Holy Scriptures: 'The Torah is not in Heaven.' God gave us the Torah from Mount Sinai, and in this Torah we find the percept: 'Thou shalt abide by the decision of the majority.'"

When Rabbi Elieser persisted in holding to his opinion, everything that he had declared clean in accord-

ance with his interpretation of the law was brought out and burnt, and he himself excommunicated.

The problem now was how to inform the celebrated teacher of what had taken place. No one would undertake the errand, until Rabbi Akiba stepped up and said: "I shall bear him the news, in order that he should not learn it 'from an outsider and feel still more deeply grieved."

Rabbi Akiba put on black garments, and enveloped himself in a black cloak. Then he went to Rabbi Elieser, and, without greeting him, seated himself upon the ground at a distance of about four cubits.

Rabbi Elieser asked: "Akiba, what means this?"

"It seems to me," answered Rabbi Akiba, "that your colleagues have abandoned you."

When Rabbi Elieser heard this, he tore his clothes, drew off his shoes, seated himself upon the ground, and began to weep aloud.

At about this time, Rabban Gamaliel, the prince, who, although he was the brother-in-law of Rabbi Elieser, had imposed excommunication upon him, had to take a sea-voyage. A terrible storm arose and threatened to wreck the ship. Rabban Gamaliel said: "I know that this danger threatens me because of Rabbi Elieser ben Hyrcanus. Lord of the world, Thou knowest well that I did not impose the penalty in order to display my authority even over the leaders of our people; I did it only for Thy glory, in order that controversies should not increase in Israel, in order that the individual, no matter how great he may be, should yield to the majority."

Thereupon the storm subsided, the sea became calm, and Rabbi Gamaliel was saved.

## XXV.

### SUBMISSION.

Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah had stood faithfully at the side of the prince, Rabban Gamaliel, during the events just recounted; but there soon arose between those two teachers a controversy, in the course of which the prince did not take sufficient account of the greatness of his colleague. Rabbi Zadok had a first-born animal in his herd. Previously, such a one used to be sacrificed in the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple, such an animal could not be used for any purpose, and had to be fed until it died or received a physical blemish. In cases of this kind, many people tried to produce the physical blemish artificially, by placing obstacles in the animal's path over which it might stumble, or by hounding the dog upon it so that it might be wounded. In consequence, the Rabbis decreed that animals which had received blemishes in this manner should not be slaughtered; furthermore, the priests were not to believe the statements of owners who asserted that such wounds had arisen without their interference.

The first-born of the herd of Rabbi Zadok had eaten some barley and had, thereby, wounded its lips. Rabbi Zadok thought that the above-mentioned rabbinical decree was applicable only to people who might be suspected of wishing to circumvent the law,—to ignorant men, but not to scholars. He came to Rabbi Joshua, who confirmed this opinion of his. He then put his question to Rabban Gamaliel, who stated that such a distinction was not to be

made in this case. When Rabbi Zadok fell back upon the decision of Rabbi Joshua, Rabban Gamaliel bade him repeat his question before the assembled scholars. Rabban Gamaliel then gave the same decision as before, and Rabbi Joshua did not venture to contradict him. When Rabban Gamaliel called him to account, and Rabbi Joshua confessed that he had voiced a dissenting opinion, the prince commanded him to rise and to listen, standing as one of the pupils, to the expounding of the Law. And so Rabban Gamaliel sat and expounded, while Rabbi Joshua had to remain standing, until all his colleagues rebelled against this stern conduct of the prince and compelled Rabbi Chuzpith, who regularly announced the opinions of Rabban Gamaliel, to put an end to the interpretation.

A little later, Rabbi Joshua was again forced to bow to the authority of the prince.

The Jewish calendar is reckoned in accordance with the circuit of the moon about the earth. The moon requires twenty-nine days, twelve hours, and seventy-three ten hundred and eightieths of an hour (29d., 12-73/1080 hrs.) to complete its circuit of the earth. Such a period of time comprises a month. But in olden times, the counting alone was not sufficient. The new moon had to be seen in the heavens; those who had seen it had to go to the prince and take an oath to this effect, whereupon he would announce the sanctification of the moon, that is to say, the formal proclamation of the new month. Fires kindled on the mountains informed the inhabitants of the Holy Land that the new moon had arisen.

This institution had to be abandoned later on account of the Sadducees, who attempted to mislead the people by kindling fires on the mountains prematurely. The

Sadducees were a sect which rejected tradition and accepted only the written scriptural word. In consequence, they taught that, in accordance with Leviticus XXIII, 15 and 16, the Feast of Weeks could be celebrated only on the first day of the week. As they could not gain general recognition for their false doctrines, they attempted, by all sorts of petty means, to produce confusion in the calendar-reckoning. To this end, they hired false witnesses. Thus, on one occasion, a pair of witnesses appeared before the prince and the court; the one testified, but the other said: "I ascended the mountain of Edom and saw the moon resting between two cliffs; its head resembled that of a calf, its ears those of a goat, its horns the antlers of a stag, and its tail lay between its two thighs. I gazed at it, became terrified, and fell backwards. If you do not believe me, behold these two thousand gold-pieces that I was paid for bearing this testimony." The good man had placed himself at the disposal of the Sadducees so that another might not be enticed to deceive the sages through false evidence.

Two witnesses appeared before Rabban Gamaliel and his court, declaring that they had seen the new moon by day; during the following night, although the sky was perfectly clear, nothing of the moon was to be seen. Consequently, the sages, among them Rabbi Joshua, were of the opinion that the witnesses had not testified truthfully. Nevertheless, Rabban Gamaliel accepted their testimony, because it agreed with his calculation. Soon thereafter, Rabban Gamaliel learned that Rabbi Joshua was planning to celebrate the festivals of that month on the days on which they would fall according to his own calculation, which differed from that of the prince. Rabban Gamaliel could not permit

this. Such a schism would produce confusion in Israel. He sent Rabbi Joshua this message: "I command you to come to me with your staff and your money on the day on which, according to your calculation, the Day of Atonement will fall."

Rabbi Joshua was exceedingly distressed. In this condition, he was found by his former pupil, Rabbi Akiba.

"Rabbi," asked the latter, "why are you so down-cast?"

"Akiba," was the answer, "it would have been better for Joshua if a severe illness had confined him to his bed for an entire year than that he should have to yield to this order of the prince."

"Permit me," said Rabbi Akiba, "to repeat to you what you once taught me."

"Speak," said Rabbi Joshua.

And Rabbi Akiba began: "We meet in the Scriptures, in connection with the fixation of the festivals, the Hebrew word for 'them' (*otam*) three times, in each case written with the letter 'vav' lacking, so that we could read it '*atem*' (you). This may be interpreted as follows: 'you, that is to say, you who stand at the head of Israel, have to establish the day of the new moon, you, even if you are mistaken, you, even if you intentionally fix it differently, you, even if you are led astray by false witnesses; in all these cases, only the day which you establish is the true day of the new moon.' "

And Rabbi Joshua replied: "You have consoled me, Akiba, you have consoled me."

Nevertheless, Rabbi Joshua sought out his old friend, Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas, in order to get his

view of the matter. Rabbi Dosa said:

“You must yield to the authority of Rabban Gamaliel, my friend. It is for this reason that the Holy Scriptures did not mention the names of the seventy elders who stood at the side of our master Moses, in order to prevent unpleasant comparisons later on, so that people might not say: ‘The teachers of our day are not like those of the past.’ Since we do not know the names of the seventy elders, the teachers of the present can, in any event, equal them and, perhaps, even surpass them. Thus, we find in the Scriptures, too, that the three greatest men of our history,—Moses, Aaron and Samuel,—are placed side by side with three much less important men—Gideon, Samson and Jephthah—in order to teach us that Gideon, Samson and Jephthah, in their time, could lay claim to the same authority as Moses, Aaron and Samuel in theirs. And we read further: ‘You shall come to the one who will be the judge in those days.’—Can a man seek a judge who does not live in his age? But the Scriptures wish to tell us thereby that the judges in Israel could demand the same respect and the same obedience as were shown to our master Moses.”

Rabbi Joshua decided to obey the command of the prince. He girded on his money pouch, took his staff in his hand, and went, on the appointed day, to Rabban Gamaliel at Jabneh. When the prince saw him, he arose, went to meet him, embraced him, and said:

“Welcome, my teacher and pupil,—my teacher in matters of wisdom, my pupil in that you obey my words. Happy the generation in which the great obey the insignificant!”

This act of Rabbi Joshua deserves all the greater recognition from the fact that astronomy was just the science in which he was equalled by none of his contemporaries, and of which he possessed such thorough knowledge as to excite our admiration even to-day, when this science has made extraordinary progress as a result of the perfection of optical instruments. Rabban Gamaliel, too, knew of the deep astronomical researches of Rabbi Joshua, as we can see from the following story told by our sages:—

Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua were once traveling together on a ship. Rabban Gamaliel had taken along some bread, Rabbi Joshua some bread and flour. After a while, the provisions of Rabban Gamaliel were exhausted, and he had to share those of his friend.

“My bread has become mouldy and unfit for use,” he said; “I must, therefore, ask you to give me some of the flour that you have with you.” “Gladly,” answered Rabbi Joshua. “You may consider as yours all that I have.”

“How did you know,” asked Rabban Gamaliel, “that our voyage would last so long?”

“Every seventy years,” replied Rabbi Joshua, “there appears a star which misleads sailors. As this is the very time at which this star is to put in its appearance, I feared that it would be seen during our voyage, and, therefore, provided myself with such provisions as are less exposed to corruption. And things happened as I had feared.”

As Rabban Gamaliel was admiring the wisdom of his friend, the latter continued:

“In our country there are two learned colleagues, Rabbi Elasar ben Kisma and Rabbi Jochanan ben

Gudgada, who are masters of the natural sciences, and yet have neither bread to eat nor clothes to wear."

When the voyage was at an end, Rabban Gamaliel wished to give offices to the two scholars whose names had been mentioned by Rabbi Joshua, in order to shield them against poverty. But they refused to accept these offices, and Rabban Gamaliel addressed them:

"It is not power and honor that I bestow upon you, but cares and burdens; for the higher a man's position, the greater are his slavery and dependence."

One of the most celebrated astronomers of modern times was Edmund Halley. This man earned his chief laurels through the reckoning of the regular return, at long intervals, of Halley's comet, named after him. The learned Rappoport, former chief Rabbi of Prague, proved that this Halley's Comet is the one of whose regular return Rabbi Joshua was aware sixteen hundred years before.

## XXVI.

### THE ACADEMY.

Rabban Gamaliel had twice vanquished Rabbi Joshua; but a third controversy was to have calamitous consequences for the prince. It seems that Rabban Gamaliel, despite the firmly-established principle that the majority rules in all disputed cases, claimed a greater authority for himself. While the four distinguished Rabbis, as related above, were tarrying for some time in Rome, and were sitting together one festival night, the lamp by which the room was lit fell over. Rabbi Akiba immediately hastened to set it aright. Rabban Gamaliel had differed with his comrades as to whether this was permitted; the latter considered it permissible, whereas Rabban Gamaliel believed it to be forbidden. And the prince exclaimed indignantly: "Akiba, how can you dare to decide our dispute by actual deed?" To which Rabbi Akiba replied: "Have you not taught us, master, that the majority rules?"<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Rabban Gamaliel became enraged at Rabbi Akiba, when the latter, with reference to the grace after meals that is said in the presence of the prince, established by actual deed the opinion of the three colleagues, which was opposed to that of Rabban Gamaliel. Here, too, Rabbi Akiba applied the above-mentioned principle.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Compare, Tosephta Betza, Chap. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Compare, Berachoth 37a.

But Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah who, after Rabbi Elieser ben Hyrcanus had withdrawn from the field of general educational activity, was undoubtedly the foremost teacher in Israel, submitted only with reluctance to the authority of the prince. It has been related above how, in two cases, Rabban Gamaliel exercised his authority even over Rabbi Joshua. The third time he was not to succeed. There was a difference of opinion among the Jewish sages as to whether or not the prayer known as the "Eighteen Benedictions" must be included in the evening services. Rabbi Joshua taught that it must, whereas Rabban Gamaliel held that the inclusion of this particular prayer in the evening services was purely voluntary. Once a disciple came to Rabbi Joshua and put this very question to him, and the master, of course, answered in accordance with his view. Then the same disciple went to Rabban Gamaliel, who gave a contrary opinion; whereupon the student said: "Rabbi Joshua teaches the opposite."

"Come into the academy to-morrow," said the prince, "and repeat your question." And he did so. Rabban Gamaliel decided as he had done previously, and Rabbi Joshua did not venture to contradict. When Rabban Gamaliel took him to account and Rabbi Joshua confessed that he had uttered a dissenting opinion, the prince commanded him to rise and to listen to the expounding of the law while standing, like an ordinary student. Thus Rabban Gamaliel sat and expounded, while Rabbi Joshua had to remain standing, until his colleagues all revolted at this unreasonable conduct of the prince and compelled the announcer of Rabban Gamaliel's legal opinions to interrupt the lecture. Then all the scholars who were present, to the number of seventy-two, arose as one

man and called to Rabbi Simon the Chasan (the official to whom was entrusted the maintenance of order): "Speak." And they had him read aloud the verse from the prophet Nahum (chapter 3, verse 19): "Over whom has not thy wickedness passed continually?"<sup>1</sup> (According to the Jerusalem Talmud, the sages thus clothed their reproaches against the prince in a Biblical verse so as not to appear to be insulting him). Rabbi Simon addressed Rabban Gamaliel, and all those present listened while standing, one saying to another: "How long will we permit Rabbi Joshua to be insulted by the prince? He offended him on the occasion of the incident concerning the first-born of Rabbi Zadok's herd, he humiliated him the following year at the ascertainment of the appearance of the New Moon, and now he insults him again! We must deprive him of the princely dignity, we must depose him!"

They entered upon a consultation and decided to depose Rabban Gamaliel. But who should be put in his place? Rabbi Joshua, who deserved it above all others? Impossible! It would have seemed as though personal reasons, a preference for Rabbi Joshua, had spurred the sages to this severe step against Rabban Gamaliel. Next to Rabbi Joshua, the greatest man in Israel was Rabbi Akiba; but they could not make up their minds to elect him prince, since he was of heathen descent. The choice fell upon the youthful Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, who was of an artistocratic family; he was a direct descendant, ten generations removed, of the highpriest Ezra, who had led Israel back from the Babylonian captivity. Despite his youth, he was a thor-

<sup>1</sup>Compare the Response of Rabbi Joseph of Trani to Yoreh Deah, No. 16.

ough scholar, capable of deciding all questions; moreover, he was very wealthy, and could make great sacrifices for the community, whenever necessary. When Rabbi Elasar was offered the princely estate, he said: "I must first take counsel with my wife." The spouse of Rabbi Elasar had no false ambition; she sought to restrain him, because she feared that he, too, might be deprived of his lofty station, and because she thought that her husband was still too young for people to have the necessary reverence for him. But a miracle happened, and the hair of the young Rabbi's head and beard turned white. Rabbi Elasar hesitated no longer to accept the rank of prince which had been offered to him. He returned to the academy, ascended the seat of the prince, and conducted the exposition of the law.

Rabban Gamaliel, during his administration, had kept the doors of the academy closed, and had admitted only those who, he was convinced, were busying themselves with the Torah solely from pure motives. But now the doors of the academy were thrown wide open and entrance granted to all. From every direction streamed sages and students, and whereas, previously, eight benches had sufficed, hundreds had now to be set up, so that the long rows of teachers and pupils resembled the rows of vines in a vineyard. For this reason, we speak of the celebrated "vineyard of Jabneh," the "vineyard of the Eternal, the Lord of Hosts." On that day, numberless questions were put and countless doubts solved; on that day the opinions and decisions of the preceding generations were tested; on that day, the Mishnaic tractate "Eduyoth" was given its final form; and wherever we read in the Talmud, "on that day,"

the day on which Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah ascended the princely throne is meant.

That day, too, will always remain a perpetual memorial to the great-mindedness of the deposed prince, Rabban Gamaliel. He was not filled with hatred toward those who had removed him from office; he did not seek to take vengeance upon them, nor did he grumbly retire from active life; but, on the contrary, he remained in the academy and took part in the weighty discussions which arose. In many of the difficult questions that were raised, he expressed his opinion and offered no objection if the majority opposed him. Thus, it was decided on that day that proselytes with the complete status of such might be received from the inhabitants of the lands of Ammon and Moab of those days, since they no longer belonged to the nations which had been refused admission by God into the community of Israel.

Rabbi Akiba was also considerably moved by the entire episode; he had been designated, because of his knowledge and his activity, as the worthiest to succeed the deposed prince, yet another had been given the preference. He would have wished to be entrusted with the rank of prince, not in order to satisfy personal ambitions, but that he might be able to render greater service to the cause of Israel. And so he said, in a tone of melancholy: "Not because Elasar is a greater scholar than I, was he preferred to me, but because he is descended from distinguished ancestors. Happy is the man who can fall back upon the merits of his ancestors." (Talmud Jerushalmi).

On the next day, Rabban Gamaliel decided to effect a reconciliation with Rabbi Joshua. He visited him in his home. The walls of the house which Rabbi Joshua

inhabited were blackened by smoke, for he carried on the trade of charcoal-burner. When Rabban Gamaliel saw him, he said: "One can recognize, from the walls of your house, that you are a charcoal burner."<sup>1</sup>

"You did not know that until now?" asked Rabbi Joshua. "That is just the misfortune, that you do not realize with what difficulty we must earn our livelihood; otherwise you, who have never experienced the lower cares of life, would not dare to treat us so scornfully."

"I have sinned," answered Rabban Gamaliel. "I beg of you, pardon me."

"I cannot pardon you the painful insult that you inflicted upon me three times," answered Rabbi Joshua.

"If you will not do it for my sake, then pardon me for the sake of my father. You knew him, you loved and esteemed him, the great teacher in Israel who died the death of a martyr for the glorification of the name of God."

And Rabbi Joshua pardoned him.

After Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua had become reconciled, Rabbi Joshua decided to have the sages reinstate Rabban Gamaliel in his former position. A laundryman offered to carry this message to the rabbis assembled in the academy. He did as he had promised; but Rabbi Akiba said to his colleagues:

"Bolt the doors, so that the servants of Rabban Gamaliel may not come and do us violence!"

When the laundryman reported this to Rabbi Joshua, the latter said:

"I suppose I must go myself and inform the rabbis."

<sup>1</sup>The Hebrew term here employed is also interpreted "needle-maker," but the more logical rendering is "charcoal-burner."

He did so, and Rabbi Akiba said: "If you, Rabbi Joshua, have become reconciled to him and have pardoned him, there is no longer any reason why we should remain angry with him."

The sages then decided to reinstate Rabban Gamaliel, with the provision that Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah retain a portion of the honor that had been transferred to him. From that time on, Rabban Gamaliel was to preside in the academy two successive weeks; during the third week, Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah was to have charge; and this process was to be repeated indefinitely.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, we often encounter the question in the Talmud: "Whose week was it?" and the answer: "It was the week of Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah." Rabbi Elasar's expression, "I am like a man seventy years old," may also be explained from the events of the time. Although he was still young, Rabbi Elasar had the appearance of a septuagenarian. The student who had directed his fateful question first to Rabbi Joshua and then to Rabban Gamaliel, was Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai, who later became so celebrated.

<sup>1</sup>The reading in the Talmud, whereby Rabban Gamaliel was assigned three weeks and Rabbi Elasar every fourth week, must be corrected. Compare the commentary of Rabbi Solomon Sirilas to Jerushalmi Berachoth.

## XXVII.

### INTO THE FUTURE.

Our sages tell us, in the tractate "Hagiga" (p. 14b): "Four men entered paradise: Ben Azai, Ben Zoma, Acher, and Rabbi Akiba; and Rabbi Akiba said to them: 'As soon as you come to the stones of pure marble, do not exclaim: "Water, water!" because it is said: "He who utters falsehoods, will not appear before My eyes."' Ben Azai gazed and died, and it is to him that the saying has reference: 'Dear in the eyes of the Almighty is the death of His pious ones.' Ben Zoma gazed and became insane and it is to him that the proverb has reference: 'If thou findest honey, enjoy it in moderation; otherwise thou mightest become satiated and have to spew it out.' Acher cut off some of the plants. But Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and came out again in peace, and to him the verse refers: 'Draw me; we will run after thee.'"

This obscure tale of our sages has for centuries challenged the attention of the greatest scholars of our people. Almost all of them agree that the paradise mentioned here is not the literal Garden of Eden, but a deep, secret science, in the study of which Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues had immersed themselves. We have already had occasion to refer to Ben Azai, the first of the four men mentioned in the anecdote. He had been, for a short time, the son-in-law of Rabbi Akiba, and had become divorced from his wife in order to devote his time exclusively to study and research. This concentration brought on his early death. The spirit in him was too

mighty to be borne by his body. He gazed and fell dead. The soul, lost in ecstatic contemplation of the highest truth, was stripped of its mortal vesture.

Not so powerful was the spirit of his friend and fellow-student, Ben Zoma, who bore the same given name as he, Simeon. Although the wisdom of Ben Zoma was praised everywhere and he was one of the keenest expounders of the sacred lore, he was, nevertheless, unable to bear that overwhelming wisdom. He gazed up and his mind became confused; he had enjoyed too much of the honey of mystic wisdom, and the clarity of his reason became disturbed.

Things went still worse with Acher, whose real name was Elisha ben Abuya. His father was a man of high social rank. When a son was born to him, he arranged a great circumcision celebration, and invited to it all the sages and other leaders of Israel. While all were enjoying themselves thoroughly, partaking of food and drink to the accompaniment of vocal and instrumental music, Rabbi Elieser said to Rabbi Joshua: "Let them enjoy themselves; we must busy ourselves with the Torah." They did thus, and soon their conversation became so elevating and so awe-inspiring that everyone was silent, and listened in amazement to the words of the two great men, from whom the rays of the light of the Torah went forth as on the day when it was revealed on Mt. Sinai. Abuya perceived the great reverence which was shown the esteemed masters; and he said: "My son shall become as one of them; I shall dedicate him to the study of the Law!" He carried out his project; but because he had not done so from unselfish motives, it was not to succeed. To be sure, the young Elisha became learned and prominent; but the fear of God was not the basis of his knowl-

edge. Even as a student, he did not occupy himself solely with the Divine teachings, and at times, the anacreontic songs of the Greek poets fell from his lap while he was in the academy. And now he had devoted himself to the investigation of that deep, mysterious science to which Ben Azai and Ben Zoma were not equal. He, too, was unable to penetrate to the truth, and doubts took possession of him. One day, he happened to be lying in the shade of a tree and studying. A man passed with his son, and perceived a bird's nest on a tree. "Look," said the father to his son, "there is a bird's nest on yonder tree. Climb up and fetch it for me; but send off the mother-bird, as it is prescribed in the Torah, 'If thou, by chance, shalt find the nest of a bird by the wayside, either upon a tree or on the ground, with eggs or young birds in it and the mother resting upon the eggs or the young, do not take the mother with her brood. Let the mother fly away; but the young thou mayest take; in order that it be well with thee and that thou mayest enjoy long life!'"

The boy obediently climbed the tree, drove off the mother, and took the nest with the young. Suddenly, the bough upon which the boy was sitting gave way and the lad tumbled down. When the frightened father hastened up, he found that his child had broken his neck and died. Weeping aloud, he shouldered the corpse, and, accusing himself as the cause of his child's death, departed amid bitter lamentations.

Elisha had observed all this, and when the wailing father had disappeared with the body of his son, he threw his book far from him and exclaimed: "Is this the Torah and this its reward? This lad fulfilled two commandments, in connection with which happiness and long life are promised; he was obedient to his father, in accordance

with the precept: 'Honor thy father and mother, that thou mayest live long and that it be well with thee,' and he dismissed the mother-bird, as we are bidden: 'Drive off the mother, but the young thou mayest take, in order that it be well with thee and that thou mayest enjoy long life.' The child did as the Torah prescribes, and had to lose his life on that account!"

At this moment, Elisha broke with his entire past and became an infidel who scorned the law. On the next day, which was a Sabbath, he encountered a woman of the street with whom he entered into a suggestive conversation. In astonishment, the girl asked: "Are you not Elisha ben Abuya, the famous teacher in Israel?" They happened just then to be near a beet-field. Instead of answering, Elisha pulled up a beet and ate it. Then the girl said: "You must certainly be another, for the great teacher for whom I took you would not desecrate the Sabbath." From that day on, Elisha was no longer called by his real name, but that of "Acher," which means "another."

The sages tell us that Elisha would not have become a renegade had he known how his grandson, Rabbi Jacob, was, many years later, to explain that utterance of the Scriptures. Rabbi Jacob said: "In order that it go well with thee—with what man does it go well here below? Man is born for difficulties, and even he who is deemed happy has more sorrow than joy. Scarcely a day passes during which physical sufferings do not attack the body, during which disappointed expectations or other vexations do not embitter the spirit. Therefore the promise: 'In order that it go well with thee' has reference to the future world, which will bring the pious man undisturbed and uninterrupted bliss. And in order that thou mayest

live long—is there a long life on earth? Even if a man becomes eighty, ninety, or a hundred years old, does not his life vanish like a dream, does it not resemble the shadow of a passing bird? Consequently, the promise: ‘That thou mayest enjoy long life’ can only have reference to the coming world, the duration of which is eternal and which one cannot measure, even if one were to range millennium upon millennium.”

Rabbi Akiba was the only one of his colleagues who attained the desired goal. He entered in peace and came out again in peace. He was content to remain within the bounds of investigation set up for the human mind by the Creator. The highest truth was revealed to him, in so far as the spirit of men is able to comprehend it. Indeed, nothing in the world that was worth knowing was concealed from him. The practical sciences, too, found in him a diligent student. With his friend, Rabbi Ishmael, he traversed the Holy Land, and they healed the sick who streamed to them at all the towns to which they came. They cured the physical ills, and for internal maladies, they gave medicaments, the use of which was always crowned with success. In the course of their wanderings they reached the village of Bartotha. Their renown had preceded them, and all the invalids came up to receive the medicines which the sages prescribed. While the latter were thus occupied, a man, who was bearing a spade, approached them.

“You are fine rabbis!” he said. “Who has given you permission to oppose the will of God? God has made these people ill, and you heal them!”

“What is your occupation?” Rabbi Akiba asked him.

“I am a gardener,” he answered, “and this is the spade with which I work my garden.”

"My son," said Rabbi Akiba, "who has permitted you to oppose the will of God? God created the earth unblemished and you wound it with your spade? God has commanded that he who wounds his fellowman must pay the expenses of medical treatment, and thereby God gave permission to heal maladies."

Shamefacedly the gardener departed. Then one of the members of the circle of pupils who were accompanying their master stepped out and said:

"Rabbi, permit me to ask you something."

"Speak, my son," answered Rabbi Akiba.

"You have taught us that King Hezekiah did six things, for three of which he received the approval of the wise men of his time; one of these was that he did away with the book of medicaments. There was extant, in his day, a book which discussed all diseases and their cures. As a result, the diseases failed of their purpose, which is to lead men to repentance and moral improvement. It was for this reason that king Hezekiah had that book removed. Now, if this is so, the question of that gardener is justified, and the permission of the Torah to heal ills could have reference only to external troubles, such as wounds, broken limbs, and the like."

"Your objection would be proper," replied Rabbi Akiba, "if you had understood the true reason for King Hezekiah's having done away with the book of medicaments. My son, the nature of men changes in the course of time and medicaments which centuries ago proved successful, might later become worthless or even harmful, because of differences in climate and in the mode of living. The use, therefore, of a remedy found in a book may often prove very dangerous, if the medicines are applied by uninstructed people without the advice of a physi-

cian; and it was on this account that King Hezekiah removed the book of medicaments from the hands of the people. But so far as concerns the remorse and repentance to which sickness is supposed to lead one, there are so many diseases which deride the skill of the physician, so many others which become chronic despite the attention of a physician, that every invalid whose heart is not devoid of all feeling begins to meditate upon his past life, to regret his shortcomings, and to return to God.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This follows the interpretation of Rabbi Joseph of Trani, on Rashi's explanation of Pesachim 56a.

## XXVIII.

### SMOULDERINGS.

After the tyrannical reign of Domitian and the weak régime of Nerva, Emperor Trajan was excessively praised by the Romans. Upon ascending the throne, he had promised not to execute a single Roman Senator. This promise he kept faithfully, so that whenever, in the course of his reign, the execution of senators who had committed capital crimes became necessary, the Emperor transferred the punishment of the culprits to the Senate. This circumstance alone was sufficient to gain for him the love of his former peers and inclined the contemporary authors so favorably toward him, that they heaped the most extravagant laudations upon his head. The Senate bestowed upon him the title of "Optimus", that is to say, "the Best." In point of fact, Trajan did possess several virtues which were well calculated to make him a great ruler, and gained for him the love of the Romans. When he handed over the sword, the symbol of office, to the prefect of the Praetorian guards, he said: "Use this for me, if I act fairly; against me, if I act unfairly." Trajan also distinguished himself by his many successful wars. He strove after the glory of becoming a second Alexander of Macedonia, and was pleased when he was thus styled, so that he actually was called by this name by his contemporaries and successors.<sup>1</sup> The conquered and ravaged provinces

<sup>1</sup>This makes the utterance of Abaya in Succah 51b comprehensible; Trajan is to be understood for the "Alexander of Macedonia" mentioned there; what is related also in the Jerusalem Talmud and the Midrashim, clearly has reference to Trajan, and is in harmony with the statements of Roman authors of the time.

had to provide the money for the magnificent buildings which the Emperor caused to be erected in Rome and other cities. When Trajan had conquered Dacia, he had a Forum built which surpassed in area and splendor any similar undertaking of the preceding emperors. The square was adorned with numerous statues, among which the figure of Trajan was frequently to be seen, and, as ornament to the statues, there were groups in bronze or marble which portrayed his most celebrated deeds. The balustrades and cornices of the buildings glittered with gilded weapons and steeds; here stood the great equestrian statue of the Emperor and the triumphal arch, which was adorned with excellent sculptures. In the middle of the Forum, the pillar of Trajan rose to a height of one hundred and twenty-eight feet, ornamented from the base of the shaft to its top with portrayals, in low relief, of scenes from the Dacian wars, as well as with gilded and highly-colored circumvolutions; upon this column as a pedestal towered the colossal statue of the conqueror. Two libraries were attached to the Forum, one for Greek and the other for Latin works; on its western side, it was bounded by a basilica of majestic proportions; arcades, lined by beautiful pillars, united the various halls and compartments for the use and enjoyment of the people. In addition to this, his principal architectural achievement, Trajan caused to be constructed a number of other noteworthy edifices—theatres, gymnasia, baths, halls, and colonnades. Italy and the provinces also profited by the Emperor's hobby for construction; he had a harbor built at Ancona, and the harbor of Civita Vecchia is to-day protected by the break-water which was reared at Trajan's behest. He had the Tagus River, in Spain, spanned by a bridge at

Alcantara, and a strong bridge constructed over the Rhine at Mayence. Whenever the river is especially low, there can still be seen at Tur Severin in Roumania, the pillars of the powerful bridge which Apollodorus, at the command of the Emperor, put up over the Danube. Trajan had roads built, in order to bind all the provinces of the great empire with the capital city and thus to assure an undiminishing supply of grain.

Contemporary writers extol the sense of justice, the modesty, and the indefatigable industry of the Emperor; they praise his handsomely majestic form, his valor in war, and his amiability in social intercourse. They attempt, as much as possible, to palliate his faults; nevertheless, even they had to admit that he was excessively immoderate in eating and drinking, that his gluttony finally brought the dropsy upon him, and that, during his entire life, he was the slave of detestable and unnatural vices. The Jewish sources have little to say in praise of Trajan; for it was this Emperor who afflicted our ancestors with unspeakable woe.

Plotina, too, the wife of the Emperor, is loudly extolled by the authors of the time, and yet she is said to have been the one who spurred Trajan on to deeds of horror against the Jews. Trajan had a son and a daughter, both of whom died in early youth. On the day that the son was born and rejoicing filled the entire vast Roman Empire, it so happened that the Jews were solemnizing the Ninth Day of Ab, the day which is spent in fasting and mourning in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem; when the daughter died, the Jews were kindling lights of gladness in their homes, in celebration of the Chanuka festival. On this occasion, Plotina said to her husband: "See how the Jews hate

you! When your son was born, they sat on the ground, and mourned, wept, and fasted. Now that your daughter has just died, they light up their houses brightly."

Trajan's hatred of the Jews undoubtedly also sprang from political reasons. In his war against the Parthians, the Jews, who lived in great numbers on the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris, resisted most stubbornly. Indeed, while the Emperor was in Rome celebrating his triumphs, the Jews in the recently-conquered countries broke forth into a new uprising; simultaneously, the Jews of Egypt, Cyrene, and the Island of Cyprus, rose in revolt, all imbued with the thought of shaking off the heavy Roman yoke. For this yoke weighed particularly heavy upon the Jews. They were exposed to the arbitrary caprices of individual governors, and efforts were made to compel them to pay divine homage to the statues of the Roman Emperors. Many sacrificed their lives for the glorification of the name of God. But the blood that had been spilled shrieked for revenge, and embittered the spirits of relatives and friends. Many women, girls, and lads were molested by the Roman legionaries, who wished to satisfy their natural and unnatural cravings upon them. But they preferred to die rather than to violate the sacred laws of God and to surrender their innocence.<sup>1</sup> To add to this misery, unendurable taxes and extortions were exacted by the Roman officials. All this made the Roman yoke utterly insufferable. But the Jews were scattered throughout the entire Roman Empire. If they should arise as one man, if the other oppressed nations would unite with them, there was some prospect that the powerful colossus, world-dominating Rome, would collapse, and that the enslaved peoples would regain their liberty. But the sages of Israel were convinced that rebellion

<sup>1</sup>Compare Jerushalmi, Sukkah, section Ha-Chilil.

would prove unsuccessful, so long as God did not bring about deliverance, and send the fervently-desired scion of the Davidic line. Rabbi Akiba, therefore, resolved to undertake distant voyages and to warn his brothers in the remotest lands of the Diaspora against an uprising in force.

Trajan had conquered a large part of Arabia, through his general, Cornelius Palma, the governor of Syria. From early times there had always been many Jews in Arabia, the first of whom had settled there even before the Babylonian exile. They, too, were now groaning under Roman oppression, and were busying themselves with plans to liberate themselves from the imperial yoke. Rabbi Akiba first turned his steps in this direction. His renown had penetrated even to these distant regions, and he was everywhere received with the highest honors, by Jews and non-Jews alike. Kings came to seek his advice, which they were then wise enough to follow.<sup>1</sup> As a result, he succeeded in dissuading the Jews of Arabia from taking part in the general uprising and, while all the other countries of the Orient were in revolt, Arabia willingly submitted to Roman rule.

In the course of his travels, Rabbi Akiba visited such outlying regions as Gaul, northern Africa, and Egypt. The Jews resided in large numbers in this last-mentioned country. After the death of Guedaliah ben Achikam, those Jews had escaped thither whom Nebuchadnezzar had permitted to remain in Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple. Under the rule of the Ptolemies, Judaea had been an Egyptian province for more than a century. The relations between the two countries were, at that time, very intimate, and, consequently, the Jewish

<sup>1</sup>Tanchuma, section Naso; Rabbah, chap. 89.

colony in Egypt had grown considerably in size. The Jews of this country had gone so far as to build a temple and offer up sacrifices, which, to be sure, was in violation of the law; but, nevertheless, affords testimony as to the importance of the Jewish population.

At the time of our narrative, the capital of the country was Alexandria, which had been founded by Alexander the Great and named after him. Here there dwelt many wealthy and learned Jews. Philo the Alexandrian, who had died a short time before the opening of our story, is considered one of the most important philosophers of the Neo-Platonic School. He had, on one occasion, been sent to Rome by his co-religionists, in order to entreat the Emperor, Caligula, to relieve the Jews of the obligation of paying divine honors to his statue. Caligula granted the request; but he could not help laughing at the stupid Jews who failed to recognize his divinity. The tribunes, Cassius Chaeres and Cornelius Sabinus, who, soon after, murdered the fiendish Emperor, also seem to have had some doubts as to his divinity.

The Judaism of Alexandrian Jewry seems at this epoch to have consisted of little more than the rejection of idolatry. The great synagogue in Alexandria still testified to the piety and the ready devotion of the first Jewish inhabitants of the city. It was constructed like a basilica, that is to say, like a royal residence. Majestic columns supported the roof, and the large space could accommodate many thousands of worshippers. Seventy golden thrones stood in the foreground for the elders of the community. So vast was the synagogue, that the voice of the cantor could not fill it. For this reason, the sexton would stand on the raised platform before the ark, with a banner which he would wave as soon as the can-

tor had finished a benediction, whereupon a thousand-voiced "Amen" would resound. Those who attended the services were grouped according to their respective guilds. In one section were the carpenters, in another the goldsmiths, in still another, the weavers, the masons, and so on for all the artisans. Whenever a stranger visited Alexandria, he had only to attend the synagogue to find all the members of his trade together and to obtain work or assistance.

## XXIX.

### THE HELLENIST.

Rabbi Akiba had arrived in Alexandria. Here he sought out Theogonos, the president of the Jewish community. His house was situated on the so-called Banopic street, and was the handsomest and stateliest of all the Jewish residences. Its interior was adorned with princely splendor, and seemed to have been equipped for a Greek rather than for an Israelite. The pictures on the walls of the beautiful living-room, the half-open ceiling of which was borne by columns of porphyry, represented the loves of Eros and Psyche; between the pillars stood the busts of the foremost pagan philosophers, and, in the rear of the room, there was a large figure of Plato. There was no lack of comfortable cushions in this handsome room; on one of these cushions reclined Theogonos, a well-preserved man of fifty, reading a Greek book. He, like almost all his Alexandrian co-religionists and compeers, had received a Greek education, and felt and thought after the fashion of the Hellenes. Most of the aristocratic Jews of Alexandria had actually become estranged from Judaism, and a contemporary writer asserts that pigs would have been much cheaper in that city, if so many Jews had not lived there. The handsomest horses belonged to the Jews, who won many victories in the Hippodrome; the Jews were the best wrestlers and boxers in the gymnasia, and the only thing that distinguished them from the Greek inhabitants was their unconcealed hatred and scorn of the Greek gods.

This, too, was the principal "*casus belli*" between the Jews and the Greeks, which was, to be sure, strengthened by deep-rooted race-hatred.

The president, who bore the title of alabarch, was interrupted in his reading; a servant announced the stranger from Palestine. When Theogonos heard the name of Rabbi Akiba, he arose from his seat and went to meet his guest.

"Welcome," he cried, "great teacher in Israel. Your fame reaches from one end of the world to the other."

Then he led his guest to an easy-chair and ordered a servant to bring in meat and drink.

"Stop," said Rabbi Akiba; "to my sorrow, I cannot partake of food in your house. Alas, what have my eyes been forced to see, since my arrival in Alexandria! The God of Israel and His holy law are forgotten. You surrender yourselves to worldly pleasures, like the pagans in whose midst you live. The sin of Alexandria is greater than was that of Jerusalem before its destruction!"

"Have you come hither, stranger, to insult me in my own home?"

"Not at all; I have been sent by the sages of Israel to restrain our brothers in Arabia, Lybia, Egypt, and other countries, from breaking out into armed revolt against the Romans. We shall not regain our freedom and independence until God will send us His redeemer. Until then, we must patiently bear the yoke which alien nations impose upon us. Every rebellion undertaken by us will fail and will contribute to the ruin of our misled people. It has become my commission to impress this fact upon our brothers. In Arabia, I succeeded in convincing our co-religionists and in inducing them to suffer meekly. Another task devolves upon me here in Egypt.

It is my unavoidable duty to rebuke my people for its backsliding, the House of Israel for its wrong-doing. You do not observe the Sabbath and the holidays which we have been commanded by God to celebrate. Your food and your drink are unclean, your mode of living is un-Jewish!"

"Permit me, stranger, to pacify your noble wrath. We Alexandrian Jews are different from the Palestinians; we are nourished at the breasts of Greek philosophy. We believe in the One God; but the laws have only a symbolical signification for us. How can we build booths on the Feast of Tabernacles, in the midst of the Greek population? They would destroy our booths, and we should thereby give occasion to serious disturbances. That may be good enough for Palestine; it is impossible in Alexandria. But, aside from this, our philosophical interpreters of the law teach us that we need retain only the spirit of the commandments. The form is unimportant. We believe in and acknowledge the One God; we hate and scorn the Greek gods. That is our Judaism. We esteem as priceless the pith; but the shell we break and cast away."

"Do you think that fruit will grow without its shell? All the laws which God has given us are of immense value, and must be carried out as God has commanded. Your philosophical exegetes lead you astray, and you yourselves believe their words only because it shows you the more convenient road. But the Almighty will not release you. He demands of Israel the fulfillment of His holy word, wherever our people may be living. Do you not fear the indignation of the Judge of the universe? You, O Alabarch, who stand at the head of this great community, bear the responsibility for all the evil that is

taking place here. How will you, when you are summoned, appear before God in Heaven and be able to justify yourself? I hurl the Divine admonition upon you and your people! Turn back from your evil ways, in order that destruction do not speedily overtake you!"

The alabarch was thunder-struck. No one had ever addressed him thus before. And this stranger was speaking to him in fluent Greek, with the force and power of a Demosthenes.

"Stranger," he said, "the learned works of the Greeks seem not to be unknown to you, either, since you speak to me in our language! Surely you know the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, and are aware of the fact that knowledge is man's highest goal. Of what good, then, are these formalities and ceremonies, which do not advance knowledge?"

"Plato did not discern the truth, nor was Aristotle able to comprehend it. The truth was revealed to us at Sinai by the Creator of the universe. Knowledge cannot be man's highest goal, since God Himself has set bounds to it, as we read: 'Man can never behold Me, as long as he lives.' The aim of human existence consists in the fulfillment of the Divine commandments and in the abstention from those things which have been forbidden us, for we are told: 'The essence of all things is: Fear God and observe His commandments, for that is the sum total of all existence.'"

"Your views differ totally from mine."

"With reference to what I have said, there can be no differences of opinion among Jews."

"But you yourselves, you sages of Israel, have so many controversies in your legal interpretations!"

"There is no dispute over the fact that the laws of

God are binding for all Israelites. Only with regard to the performance of individual commandments are there differing points of view, but these are settled in accordance with rules laid down in the 'Torah.'

"I am not your equal in this field, and therefore cannot argue with you. Tell me rather what you demand of me."

"I ask that you summon the entire congregation to the synagogue and permit me to address it."

"Synagogue? What is that?"

"The synagogue is the house of God, the great house of prayer which is the glory and the pride of the Jews of Alexandria."

"Ah, you mean the 'proseuche' (chapel)?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. Send your messengers to all the Jews of the city, and tell them that an emissary of the sages from the land of our fathers is here, and wishes to speak to them."

"I shall do as you wish. You may deliver your address at the end of the services next Sabbath."

Rabbi Akiba took leave of the alabarch. When he reached the street, a festive bustle prevailed. The feast of Dionysos was being celebrated. From all sides resounded the beating of drums and the music of flutes, the clang of bells and noisy cheering. A lad was leading a procession; wearing a wreath of ivy tendrils and swinging a Bacchic thyrsus, he was dancing along, and, behind him, men and women leaped and shouted, all excited to the verge of madness, shouting and singing. Hundreds of heads were wreathed with sprigs of vine, ivy, and asphodel; poplar, lotus, and laurel wreaths bestrode burning foreheads; skins of the panther, deer, and roe hung from naked shoulders or were whirled high into the air by

rapid gusts of wind. Artists and rich young lords passed with their mistresses to the accompaniment of bands of music. Whoever was met by this merry throng was drawn in, carried off, citizens and their wives, laborers, wenches, slaves, soldiers, sailors, officers, female flute-players, artisans, ship's-captains, excited women all were jostling one another, and dragging along a goat, which was to be sacrificed to Dionysos.

No one resisted the allurements of following the procession. How loud the double-flutes sounded, how powerfully the girls beat upon the calf-skin hides of the hand-drums, while the wind played its game with the loosened hair of the raging women and with the smoke of the torches, which wanton apprentices, clad as Pans and satyrs, swung with noisy jubilation! Here a girl, running at full speed, hurled a tambourine high into the air, so that the bells in its hoops rang so violently that it seemed as though the hollow metal balls would tear themselves free and traverse the air by paths of their own. There, near a woman intoxicated to the very border of insanity, a handsome youth hopped about with graceful leaps, carried under his arm the long ox-tail which he had attached to his body with comical care, and blew from the longest to the shortest, and then from the shortest to the longest, of the reeds which formed his pan's-flute. Occasionally, a loud bellowing resounded from the midst of the noisy procession, a roar which might have been caused either by joy or by pain. But each time it was drowned out by the laughter, wild song, and merry music. Old and young, great and insignificant, all who approached the procession, were carried away with irresistible force, and compelled to follow the throng.

Rabbi Akiba kept close to the walls of the houses, and

scornfully turned his eyes from the sight of these disgusting actions. Then he said to himself:

"It is our duty to praise the Lord of the universe and to exalt the Creator for not having made us like the nations of the various lands or moulded us like the families of the earth, for having given us a destiny different from theirs and a lot unlike that of all their multitude, for they prostrate themselves before vanity and nothingness, and supplicate gods which cannot help them. All their piety is a horror, and they solemnize their festivals with detestable indecency."

The huge synagogue of Alexandria was filled to the very last seat; it seemed as though there were a hundred thousand people present. All had eagerly come to hear the great sage from Palestine whose renown filled the world, and the throng was troubled only lest the man's voice might be unable to fill the vast space. This anxiety was groundless. The words of Rabbi Akiba resounded through the hall like peals of thunder.

"Friends and brothers," he said. "In olden times, there was a large, prosperous, mighty city, Nineveh by name. Power and prosperity had made the people of Nineveh frivolous and wanton; they robbed and defrauded one another, and led an extravagant, immoral life. God sent His prophet Jonah, the son of Amitai, to warn the frivolous, sinful inhabitants of Nineveh. 'Within forty days,' proclaimed the prophet, 'Nineveh will be destroyed.'

"Friends and brothers! I, too, have been sent to admonish you. This large and wealthy community has, for the most part, abandoned the ways of God. Forgotten are the Sabbaths and the holidays. Instead, you celebrate the festivals of the pagans, and rejoice on the holidays of

the false gods. Is it not a sort of idolatry that you adorn your homes in honor of a Greek god, that you, your sons and daughters, participate in heathen processions, disguise yourselves in every way, and join in the jubilation which resounds in honor of the idols?

“Brothers and friends! Once our forefathers served as slaves in this very land; and God brought them out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and chose us as His people. He led us to Mount Sinai and said: ‘I am the Lord, your God; you shall have no others gods before me. And in all that you say, you shall take care not to mention the names of strange gods, that they be not heard upon your lips.’ But you, my brothers, cannot utter three words without invoking the Greek gods and goddesses and swearing by their names. You give your children names which serve as reminders of these gods. Are there not many in your midst whose names mean ‘Gift of the god of the sun’ (Apollodorus), ‘offspring of the father of the gods’ (Zeugones), and others of the same kind? You see no harm in this, and it is only a custom which you have assumed in the midst of your environment. But this evil habit has estranged you completely from Jewish life. The one, omnipotent God, Creator of heaven and earth, has chosen us as His people, in order that we sanctify ourselves and be holy. It is for this reason that He gave us laws which separate us, with regard to food and drink, from all the other peoples of the earth. But you have forgotten these laws, you eat the flesh of unclean animals and have become as the heathens round about you.

“When the prophet Jonah announced his message in Nineveh, the people of the city listened to him and turned their backs on their evil ways; they put on sack-cloth

and ashes, repented and prayed to God. When God saw what they had done and beheld their sincere remorse, He pardoned them. He did not carry out the destruction with which He had threatened them, but showed mercy.

"Friends and brothers, I call upon you also, to turn back from your evil ways. Why do you wish to die, o House of Israel?

"Lo, this world resembles an inn where everyone can enjoy himself to his heart's content. But you must not believe that you will not have to give a reckoning. Everything is given upon credit, and a net is spread out over all the living. The shop is open and the shop-keeper lends; but the account-book is also open, and a hand makes entries into it. Whoever wishes to borrow, let him come and borrow; but the officials constantly move about and collect the debts from those who have contracted them, with or without the latter's consent.

"Friends, brothers! Your lives are flowing pleasantly and beautifully by, you enjoy what you possess in merry cheerfulness, and even the pauper receives so much from his prosperous brothers that he need not worry about his daily bread. But is that the purpose and the goal of life? My friends, God created man in His image, breathed into him part of His own spirit, and bestowed upon him the divine gift of reason. Shall he who is so richly-endowed, content himself with living as the beast lives, merely in order to experience enjoyment and to propagate his race? Was it for no purpose that God informed man that He created him in the Divine image? He gave man His teachings in order that he might strive upwards, might practice the true and the good.

"God raised us Israelites above all the peoples of the earth and called us His children, as we read: 'Children

are ye unto the Lord your God.' And He gave us the Torah, the priceless treasure whereby the world was created in order that we might continue to live as His children. For, as the master-mason, before he rears an edifice, designs a plan, in which the form of the building is set down, the appearance which it is to have—the halls, the stories, the cellars, the rooms, the corridors—are arranged and drawn up beforehand, so that, when the work of construction is begun, the master-mason looks over his plans and follows them in laying the foundations, arranging the cellars, building the stories, distributing the halls, corridors, and rooms,—just in the same way did God draw up the Torah as His plan for the construction of the universe before He undertook the actual creation; it is the world of the spirit, in accordance with the purpose and aims of which the world was brought into being. And this priceless treasure He gave to us and informed us that it is a priceless treasure, whereby the world was created, as we read: 'For I have given you sound doctrine, my Torah, do not forsake it.'

"My brothers, you have forgotten this Torah! You do not study it, nor do you rear your children in it; it lies in a corner, and no one of you concerns himself about it; all its glorious teachings, which would help you correctly to comprehend this world and to obtain future bliss, are lost for you. Instead, you busy yourselves with the sinful books of the Greeks, learn by heart their songs of wine and love, sing them at your banquets, and think that you have attained the goal of life when you laugh and shout right merrily. This frivolity has already seduced you to the basest of vices, and the lofty pride of Israel, its moral family life, has been abandoned by many of you. Do you believe that God's eye does not behold

you? There is nothing in the world that God does not see. But He has given man the unhampered choice of doing good and avoiding evil by his own free will.

“Friends and brothers, how you have abused this free choice! Do not permit my cry to die away without its having been taken to heart. The all-merciful God is gracious and compassionate. He does not desire the death of the sinner, He wishes rather that the backslider should abandon his evil ways and live. There was once a wicked king in Israel, whose name was Ahab ben Omri; he was an idolater, a robber and murderer; but when the prophet Elijah approached him and made his wickedness clear to him, he experienced remorse and repentance, and God pardoned him; for, God’s right hand is always outstretched to take back repentant and remorseful sinners. There was once an evil king in Judah, Manasseh, by name; he set up idols in the Temple and shed innocent blood copiously. But when he fell into distress, he forsook all the powerless gods and supplicated the One God; the Lord of heaven and earth. And God gave ear to his prayer and rescued him from need and oppression.

“Friends and brothers! You, too, are threatened by a black doom. I am neither a prophet nor the disciple of a prophet; but whoever has eyes to see can clearly perceive that the ground is quaking beneath you. Do you think that you can resist omnipotent Rome and vanquish her armies? You place reliance upon your great numbers, upon your riches, and upon the troops which you are in a position to equip. You place reliance upon all that, but upon Him from whom alone comes succor you place no reliance. Not armies nor riches procure victory; only the will of God is able to decide the outcome of battles. As long as He does not send His redeemer so

long will all struggle be not only profitless but even ruinous. Only one thing can be of advantage to you; namely, that you return to the God of your fathers with all your heart and all your soul, that you prostrate yourselves before Him in contrition, that you repent of your sins, cease eating forbidden food, do not labor on the appointed days of rest, and rear your children for the Torah and in accordance with it. If Israel falls away from the Torah and its holy laws, its life is without purpose and God will abandon it to enemies and persecutors. Turn back, O turn back, from your sinful paths, in order that God may have mercy on you and rescue you from death."

When Rabbi Akiba had finished, the whole congregation lifted up its voice as one man and wept.

"Remain with us, thou holy man," cried many, "and teach us the way upon which we should walk."

But the sermon of the Palestinian Rabbi had displeased the heads of the community; they wished to enjoy their great wealth, and did not desire to change their mode of life. They possessed the handsomest coursers, and their sons won the prizes in all the horse-races; their daughters were the most celebrated beauties in Alexandria, and were eagerly courted by aristocratic Greeks and Romans. Their houses were the gathering-places of the most distinguished artists, poets, and philosophers. They had not been penetrated by the moving words of the strange Rabbi, and they smiled at his antiquated views, which, according to their opinion, had long since been replaced by Greek philosophy. They met for a brief discussion, at the end of which the alabarch Theogonos accosted the Rabbi and said:

“Stranger, Alexandria is unfavorable soil for your teachings. We, the heads of the community, demand that you leave our city. Return to Judaea. If you refuse to depart, we shall know how to compel you.”

Rabbi Akiba was about to reply; but the alabarch turned his back upon him and proudly withdrew. Rabbi Akiba, however, only said to himself: “Whom God wishes to destroy, he first smites with blindness.”

### XXX.

#### RESCUED.

Rabbi Akiba prepared for his departure; he directed his steps toward the harbor of Alexandria in order to obtain passage on a ship. Alexandria was the foremost commercial city of the old world. Huge vessels, laden with corn, were from time to time sent to Rome, to supply the capital of the empire with the means of subsistence. These ships were of much more than ordinary size and were convoyed by men-of-war. Yet the grain-fleets did not comprise the principal maritime activity of the Alexandrians. The products of India were brought to Egypt from the mouth of the Indus and the coasts of Malabar, and were distributed thence throughout the entire world. Ivory, tortoise-shell, woolen and silk wares, at that time rare and costly, pearls and diamonds, gums and spices were shipped from Alexandria to all the harbors along the Mediterranean. Pliny asserts that the yearly export in these articles was estimated at one hundred million sestercea or about three hundred thousand dollars in our currency, a sum which, for those days, was enormous. One of the principal products of Egypt was that particular kind of reed known as "papyrus", which grew almost exclusively along the banks of the Nile; from which the cheapest and most suitable writing paper was prepared, and to which our paper owes its name.

Rabbi Akiba had to seek long before he found a ship which was to sail for Jaffa. Most of the ships were bound for Rome, whither they brought corn, wine, oil, wool, spices, precious metals and other costly things. Finally

he found a vessel laden with papyrus which was about to set sail for Asia Minor and secured passage in it.

As the ship was leaving the harbor, Rabbi Akiba was standing on deck and gazing sadly at the wealthy and beautiful city on which he had just turned his back.

"Ah," he said to himself, "there is no one in our day who really knows how to admonish. The prophet Jonah was sent to the heathens at Nineveh, and he succeeded in arousing them to remorse and improvement. But my admonition fell on deaf ears in Alexandria!"

The weather was very favorable. The wind filled the sails, and the oarsmen worked incessantly, so that the ship flew swiftly on. In the good seasons and with favorable winds, the ancient method of sea-voyaging, by oars and sails combined, was speedier than was ours previous to the invention of steam navigation. On a good passage, a sailing-vessel in those days could travel one hundred and sixty-two kilometers in twenty-four hours.

The Asiatic coast was already in sight and Rabbi Akiba's heart beat higher at the thought that he would soon, after a very long absence, again see his beloved native land, his adored wife, and his no less cherished children, colleagues, and pupils.

Dolphins raced after the ship to catch whatever might be thrown overboard; large, curiously formed fishes approached; all kinds of sea-monsters came in sight. Rabbi Akiba was moved to exclaim: "How manifold are Thy works, o Lord; Thou hast fashioned them all in Thy wisdom, the earth is full of Thy creations. These huge creatures that live in the sea would die at once if they were to be placed on dry land; and the great monsters which live on land would immediately perish in the waves of the sea. How manifold are Thy works, o Lord; Thou hast fashioned them all in Thy wisdom."

Rabbi Akiba looked up into the vault of the heavens. There, far in the west, he saw a cloud of the size of a man's hand. Quickly he sought the ship's-captain and said to him:

"See, there, that little cloud. A storm is brewing, make the nearest harbor."

The captain laughed at the warning.

"Your fears are unfounded, Judaeen," he said, "this little cloud will do us no harm. To be sure, I could change the course of the ship and put in at a well-protected harbor, but that would unnecessarily prolong the voyage. In twelve hours, at the very utmost, we shall be securely tied up in the harbor of Jaffa."

"Do as you please," said Rabbi Akiba, "but your carelessness will lead you to a watery grave."

It was not long before the entire heavens were overcast with sombre clouds. A fearful storm arose, and the ship was tossed about like a toy on the towering waves. The sails were torn, the masts broken to pieces, and the oarsmen ceased their useless toil.

"Oh God," said Rabbi Akiba, "am I to die here, am I to find death in the waves of the sea, become a welcome prey to the hungry dolphins? Is Thy punishment overtaking me because I did not sufficiently perform my duty in Alexandria, because I left that city without having made repeated efforts to lead my straying brothers there into the proper path? May Thy holy will be done, O God! Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the best."

In the meantime, the crew had cast the cargo overboard, in order to lighten the ship. The storm drove the vessel on, far past its destination. After a few hours, a strange, unknown coast came into view. The oarsmen

again seized their oars and set vigorously to work to effect a landing. Suddenly there was a resounding crash; the ship had rushed headlong upon a coral reef, and had split straight through the middle. The waves swallowed up crew and passengers.

The return of Rabbi Akiba to his native land was fruitlessly awaited. He had written his wife from Alexandria, informing her of his early home-coming. Already in the days of Emperor Augustus, a postal service had been established throughout the Empire, whereby official dispatches were carried by couriers from station to station. Under the later Emperors, private people also were permitted to entrust their letters to the imperial runners. The letter had safely reached Rachel, but the anxiously awaited arrival of the beloved husband did not take place. Then the sad news arrived that Rabbi Akiba had left Alexandria on a vessel bearing a cargo of papyrus, and that, from all indications, the ship had met with a mishap on the passage. Rabban Gamaliel, who was also returning from a voyage, had seen the wreckage of the ship floating in mid-ocean.

The Rabbis were assembled in the academy at Jabneh; Rabban Gamaliel was to deliver a discourse. He said:

"My heart is sorely oppressed because of our brother Akiba. I myself saw floating on the open sea the wreckage of the ship which was to bring him home. Alas, that so great a mind and such thorough knowledge of the Torah had to become the spoil of the waves, Akiba's pure and holy body the plunder of the voracious fishes and sea-monsters!"

There arose such a weeping and wailing that the walls of the academy trembled and the tears of the

mourners besprinkled the floor. The revered teachers of Israel surrendered themselves to bottomless grief; the distress was as general as at the time when the Temple had been destroyed.

Suddenly, the door of the academy opened, and a powerful form forced a path for itself through the lamenting throng. In amazement, all gazed at him, and recognized, to their inexpressible joy, the teacher and friend who had been given up for lost. Rabban Gamaliel left his dais, and hastened to the newcomer with outstretched arms.

"Akiba," he cried, "my friend, my brother, my son, favorite of God and favorite of my soul, have you arisen from the dead?"

They embraced one another lovingly. Then Rabbi Joshua pressed up, and Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Tarphon, and Rabbi Ishmael, and Rabbi Jose the Galilean, and Rabbi Zadok, and Rabbi Chananiah ben Teradion, and Rabbi Chalaphta, and Rabbi Chuzpith, and Rabbi Jose ben Dormiskos, and Rabbi Jochanan ben Gudgada, and Rabbi Elasar Kisma, and Rabbi Judah ben Betherah, and Rabbi Ilai, and Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai, and Rabbi Yeshebab, and all the others; it was a long time before they could all kiss the friend whom they had believed dead. Then Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Simeon, the sons of Rabbi Akiba, who had themselves already become sages in Israel, also entered, and, last of all, Rabbi Jochanan, Akiba's brother-in-law (for Kalba Sabua had, at the urgent proposal of his son-in-law, re-married late in life, and God had given him a son, who had become a pupil of his brother-in-law and, finally, a sage in Israel).

The jubilant rejoicing would not cease until Rabban Gamaliel commanded silence and called upon the friend who had returned to tell how he had escaped death.

Rabbi Akiba related: "The ship which I boarded in the harbor at Alexandria was driven by a storm upon a coral reef and it split in two; I commended my soul to the Almighty and cried: 'Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the best!' I had seized a spar of the shattered vessel, and clung firmly to it. Thus, I was not swallowed up by the waves; one passed me on to the next, until I was washed ashore. At this juncture I lost consciousness. When I awoke, I found myself in a solitary region that was unknown to me. I wandered into the interior, until I found a small city, wherein dwelt some of our co-religionists, who provided me with food, drink, clothing, and money, so that I was able to resume my laborious homeward journey. While I was still far off, I learned that I was being mourned at home for lost. Consequently, I hastened here first, even before I sought out my wife, in order that my teachers and friends might not spend their time in unnecessary lamentations and that the study of the law might not thereby be interrupted."

"Hail to you, Akiba," said Rabban Gamaliel. "Even the misfortunes which you encountered contribute towards clearing up and establishing the legal code. We are just now engaged in a discussion of the question as to whether or not one who has been reported to have suffered shipwreck or, in some other manner to have fallen into a large body of water, is to be considered dead, so that the wife may be permitted to re-marry. The miraculous deliverance whereby you escaped death proves that, in such cases, the demise of the person in question is not to be considered established as long as the corpse has not been found and identified as that of the missing man. How great are these words of the wise! All their teachings descend from God, who revealed them to Moses on Sinai!"

## XXXI.

### DEPOSED.

The long-dreaded uprising broke out; almost simultaneously, the Jews in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, in Cyrene, and on the island of Cyprus, revolted. At first, the Jews fought with some success, and routed the Roman leader, Lupus. Then the Emperor sent his most trusted general to quell the rebellion. Martius Turbo advanced against the rebels in Egypt and Cyrene. This clever warrior avoided an open engagement with the rebels; he sought to inflict minor losses upon them and, thereby, to dampen their ardor. Gradually, he succeeded in driving back the Jews, after stubborn resistance on their part. Trajan had commanded his general to exterminate the Jewish population of all the districts in which the revolt was seething. Martius Turbo obeyed this command literally. Entire regions were converted into waste lands by the destruction of those who had, until then, been cultivating them. The blood flowed in streams. The grim foe spared neither women nor children. The Jews of Alexandria, too, were included in the general punishment. Their palatial synagogue was destroyed and razed to the ground, and the blood of the slain dyed red the sea. Just as furiously did Lucius Quietus, the Emperor's favorite general, rage against the Jews of Mesopotamia and the adjacent countries through which the torch of rebellion had been borne. Lucius was a Moor by birth, having entered the Roman army together with a number of his fellow-countrymen. He had been skillful enough to gain the favor of the Emperor to such an extent that the latter was seriously considering adopting him as his son and designating him as his successor.

After Lucius had defeated the Babylonian Jews, the Emperor appointed him governor of Palestine. He made use of this lofty station to torture and oppress the Jews in the most horrible ways. He wished to compel them to worship the images of the Emperor and to offer up sacrifices before them. At this, the Jewish residents of Palestine also attempted to throw off the unendurable yoke. Two brave men, Papus and Julian, placed themselves at the head of the uprising. But the poorly-armed, undrilled troops could not make a stand against the Roman forces. Lucius Quietus traversed the country victoriously, setting fire to the cities and villages in his path. Jabneh, too, was destroyed, and the Sanhedrin had to remove to Usha. The prince, Rabban Gamaliel, was on the point of being arrested and executed, when a Roman patrician rescued him, at the expense of his own life. The troops which Papus and Julian had assembled, were put to flight, and both leaders were taken prisoners. The victorious general had them led into his presence.

"How did you dare, you rebels," he exclaimed, "to rise in revolt against the Emperor?"

"We could no longer endure the horrors which you were inflicting upon us in the name of the Emperor," replied Papus. "You wished to force us to prostrate ourselves before images and to pay them divine homage. But we serve only the one omnipotent God, Creator of heaven and earth!"

"If your God is so mighty," sneered the Roman general, "why does He not deliver you from my hand?"

"We are sinners," replied Julian, "and have deserved death. If He does not punish us through you, He knows many other means of giving us our just deserts. But you are not worthy of beholding a miracle with your eyes."

"You deluded Jews," answered Quietus, "who, in the very face of death, dare to treat me with scorn! Hear my words; you two must die; not only you, however, but all your compeers. I shall now pass through Judaea, and I shall wipe out everything that belongs to your race; I shall spare neither men nor women, neither children nor grey-beards. And if I ever become the Roman Emperor, I shall make it my life's work to blot from the face of the earth whatever bears the Jewish stamp. Let this promise of mine embitter your death-sentence!"

"If you take counsel," said Julian, "it will be nullified; if you utter a threat, it will fail of effect; for God is with us."

"Lead them to their doom," shrieked Lucius Quietus.

Then something miraculous, unexpected, happened. Two couriers dashed up and exclaimed:

"Emperor Trajan is dead, Hadrian is Emperor; Lucius Quietus is deposed from office! Seize him, soldiers, and fetter him securely! He is charged with high treason and will be judged in Rome. Behold the written order of the Emperor, Publius Aelius Hadrian!"

Thereupon, Lucius Quietus was seized and cast into chains by his soldiers. Papus and Julius had been snatched from the very jaws of death.

Emperor Trajan had been attacked by dropsy in Antioch; he took leave of his armies, in order to return to Rome, but death overtook him in the Cilician town of Selimus, without his previously having succeeded in carrying out his long-cherished plan of designating his favorite general, Lucius Quietus, as his successor. On the other hand, his wife, Plotina, skilfully managed to win the imperial purple for her favorite, Publius Aelius Hadrian. When Trajan died, the Empress kept secret the demise of the ruler of the world and had the corpse

removed from the room in which her husband had met his end. In the place of the deceased Emperor, a trusted servant of the Empress lay down upon the now vacant couch. Plotina drew the hangings tightly about the bed, and called witnesses into the room, who asserted that they had heard a weak, groaning voice, apparently that of the Emperor, declare that he adopted his faithful and beloved cousin, Publius Aelius Hadrian, as his son, and appointed him his successor. The Empress then signed the deposition of the witnesses in the name of the Emperor and at the bidding of the same groaning voice.

Two days later, Hadrian, who was then in Antioch, received the news of his adoption and the treacherously delayed report of the death of the Emperor. Immediately, the legions paid him homage, and he distributed lavish gifts among them. Then he sent an embassy to the Senate and asked for the corroboration of the last will of the deceased ruler as well as of the wishes of the legions. Before all, however, he sought to remove his most dangerous rival, Lucius Quietus, in which, as we have seen, he was completely successful. Quietus was brought to Rome in manacles and sentenced to death by the submissive Senate; he paid the penalty of decapitation.

A terrible danger had been averted for the Jews by the arrest and death of Quietus. In commemoration of this miraculous deliverance, the sages set aside a day of feasting, to be known as Trajan's Day. This festival, however, was later discontinued, with the arrival of other sorrows.

In the beginning, the reign of the new Emperor promised to be unusually favorable to the Jews. Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Akiba enjoyed high favor in his eyes; and he attempted, with the aid of these wise men, the greatest scholars of the world, to quench his inappeasable thirst for knowledge.

Publius Aelius Hadrian, like his presumed foster-father, was a Spaniard by birth. His family, which was native of the small town of Hadria or Adria that had given the Adriatic Sea its name, had wandered to Spain with the armies of the Scipios, some three centuries before the events herein recounted, had settled in the Roman colony of Atalica, and had attached to its cognomen, Aelius, the surname Hadrianus, in memory of its original home. The new Emperor had been reared in Rome. When, at the age of ten, he lost both of his parents, Trajan, who was a cousin of Hadrian's father, was entrusted with the guardianship of the boy. The latter was sent to Athens, where, for five years, he studied under the ablest teachers of the city. He was filled with the spirit of the Athenians, and not only adopted their language but even vied with them in all their particular accomplishments, in singing, playing on musical instruments, mathematics, medicine, painting, and sculpture. His memory was little short of marvelous, his diligence incredible. He took interest and pleasure in many things, loving variety especially. He was keen and biting in repartee, and ever ready to overwhelm an opponent with crushing logic or with words of mockery and contempt. His body resembled his mind in flexibility. In addition to the ordinary exercises in fencing and gymnastics, he was also passionately fond of the exciting diversions of the chase. Since the death of the peerless Julius Caesar, Rome had not witnessed such all-embracing intellectual powers, and, in the imposing beauty of his person and the charm of his manners, Hadrian might well have been compared to Apollo. But the firm support of a good and noble character was lacking to all these brilliant qualities; the suggestions of his caprice determined all his deeds; and, with the passing of time, his faults grew immoderately.

## XXXII.

### THE CONVERT.

It has already been related above that a close relative of the imperial line, Aquila by name, (pronounced, in Greek, "Akilos," and in Aramaic "Onkelos") came to seek instruction from Rabbi Elieser and Rabbi Joshua.

Aquila was a nephew of Emperor Hadrian;<sup>1</sup> his father was named Kalonikos or Kalonymos, and possessed rich estates on the island of Pontus. In earliest childhood, Aquila was given instruction in Hebrew by a pedagogue of Jewish descent whom Kalonikos, at the conclusion of the Jewish war under Titus, had bought in the slave-market at Alexandria. When the latter accompanied his uncle, who had become prefect of Syria, Aquila profited by the opportunity to strike up an acquaintance with the sages and to have himself instructed by them in the sacred lore.

"Uncle," said he to the prefect of Antioch, "permit me to travel through the country and form commercial connections."

"Is it possible that you wish to earn money, Aquila?" asked Hadrian. "I possess sufficient treasure, and I shall bequeath to you all that you will ever be able to use."

Hadrian was married to Sabina, a niece of Emperor Trajan. But the marriage was childless and unhappy.

<sup>1</sup>This is the reading in most sources, although Talmud Gittin, 56b, makes him a nephew of Emperor Titus. Compare Midrash Tanchuma, section on "Mishpatim;" see also the introduction of Chief Rabbi Adler to his "Netina La-ger" (Wilna 5634).

The baser passions to which Hadrian was a slave drew down upon him the contempt of his wife, and the gloomy, malicious, and apathetic character of Sabina caused her husband to avoid her as much as possible and to live apart from her. All the more, therefore, did Hadrian love the son of his sister; he had no closer relative. As Hadrian was closely related to Trajan, since he had married the latter's only niece; as, furthermore, he stood very high in the favor of the Empress, Plotina, so high indeed, that contemporary writers speak of an illicit relationship between them, he had soon flattered himself with the expectation of being adopted by Trajan and appointed his successor. In this case there was no slight prospect that the imperial purple would, one day, fall to Aquila, Hadrian's nearest relative. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the prefect of Syria stood ready to bequeath a considerable share of his wealth to his beloved nephew and was surprised at his apparent desire to do business.

"Thanks, uncle," replied Aquila, "for your magnanimous offer. But I am not fascinated by the desire for possession; I find real joy only in the struggle for gain. You, the wisest of all men, can certainly give me the best advice as to how I may achieve successful results in business."

"I shall not withhold my counsel from you," answered Hadrian, flattered. "Whenever you discover wares which, though intrinsically valuable, are neglected and unheeded by people because of the unfavorableness of the time, purchase them. You will be able to obtain them at a low price, and you need only await the moment when their value will again rise. In this way you will do excellent business."

"Your advice is shrewd," answered Aquila, "and exactly in conformity with the man who is counted among the leaders of his epoch in all the arts and sciences, who equals a Polycletes in painting and a Euphronor in sculpture; who, in mathematics, is a second Euclid, and, in medicine, another Hippocrates; whom Aristotle, in philosophy and Demosthenes, in oratory, would number among their most gifted disciples."

Hadrian smiled; the extravagant praise which his nephew showered upon him did not seem to him exaggerated.

Ashas already been mentioned, Aquila now journeyed to Jabneh, where he was first rejected by Rabbi Elieser, but then accepted and encouraged by Rabbi Joshua. Rabban Gamaliel and Rabbi Akiba, too, proved friendly and loving teachers. Aquila became a convert to Judaism, and performed upon himself the act of circumcision. From now on he studied day and night, and translated the Scriptures into Greek. Even Rabbi Elieser took the young proselyte under his wing when he discerned the latter's seriousness, and imparted much information to him. When Aquila had completed the Greek translation of the Bible, he read it in the presence of his teachers, Rabbi Elieser and Rabbi Joshua, who praised it beyond all bounds. They applied to him the Biblical verse: "Thou art the handsomest of the sons of men, grace is poured out upon thy lips, God has blessed thee eternally" (Psalms 45, 3).

Only a few fragments of this Bible-translation of Aquila are still extant; these are to be found in the "Hexapla," of Origen, edited by Montfaucon. Rabbi Azariah dei Rossi also quotes part of it in his "Meor Enayim, Imre Binah" (Chapter 45). We can see from

these fragments that Aquila had labored to translate the Scriptures verbatim and to render each Hebrew word by a corresponding Greek expression. This method is, to be sure, very precise, but it often obscures the sense, and does violence to the spirit of the language in which the translation is written, consequently, Aquila determined to prepare another translation, but this time in the language which was then currently spoken by the Jews. He strove to construe the meaning rather than the individual words, and to take into account, thereby, the traditional interpretation of his teachers, Rabbi Elieser and Rabbi Joshua. This is the translation which immediately became so famous and, for the Jews, so important, under the name of "Targum Onkelos." It is preserved intact, and is read weekly by every observant Jew, in addition to the original text.

As a result of these strenuous studies and labors, the vigor of Aquila was measurably lessened; his face became pale and his cheeks were sunken.

When he received the news that his uncle had become Emperor, he hastened to Antioch, in order to pay him due homage and to felicitate him.

"Aquila," cried Hadrian, as his nephew approached, "how poorly you look! Your countenance is pale, your cheeks are emaciated, your frame is bowed. You have certainly proved unsuccessful in your commercial enterprises!"

"Quite the contrary, beloved uncle," replied Aquila, "I have reaped the richest profits."

"What wares have you purchased?"

"The most precious that exist, wares which cannot be paid for with all the treasures of the world."

"What price then, did *you* pay?"

"Only a bit of my foreskin."

"You are speaking riddles."

"I have become a Jew and have circumcised myself."

"Wretch, how did you dare such a thing? You, my nearest in kin, should have asked my advice before taking so irrevocable a step."

"I did ask you, uncle, and you yourself counselled me to act as I did."

"What, I? Ordinarily, I have a good memory, but I recall nothing at all of this nature."

"My uncle, you advised me to seek out those wares which are neglected because of the unfavorableness of the time and are permitted by people to pass unheeded, wares, however, which, in the course of time, must rise in price. Uncle, I have tested all religions and the character of all nations, and have found no people that is as base and as contemptible in the eyes of the world as is Israel. And yet it will, one day, again rise in value, as the prophet Isaiah promised, in the name of the one, omnipotent God: 'Thus saith the Eternal, the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One, to the oppressed of heart, the despised people, the slave of the dominant nations: a time will come when kings will behold Israel and rise, princes will prostrate themselves; the faithfulness of the Eternal, the Holy One of Israel, who has selected thee, will bring this to pass.'"

The Emperor had a freedman, named Alexander, who stood in high favor with him and was present at this conversation.

"All-powerful Caesar," said he, "such words addressed to you deserve the penalty of death. What! You, the ruler of the world, should bend the knee to the Jews!"

At this, the Emperor grew furiously enraged at the

freedman ; he struck the latter in the face so violently that he staggered back. Then he said wrathfully :

“You wish to irritate me to the point of putting to death the son of my sister. He has said nothing improper. Even a simple legionary can be exalted by the favor of the gods ; but so long as he is nothing more than a simple legionary, I need not bend the knee to him. The Jews are still a humble and despised people ; but that does not exclude the possibility of their attaining some day, the highest rung of the ladder of fortune.”

The freedman could not recover from the insult which the Emperor had inflicted upon him. He left the room and committed suicide.

In the meantime, the Emperor said to Aquila : “Ad-duce for me your reasons for becoming a convert to Judaism.”

“I wished,” replied Aquila, “to study the doctrines which the Almighty revealed to the Jews, and which are more precious than all the world’s riches.”

“You could have investigated these doctrines without changing your faith and circumcising yourself.”

“No, uncle, that is impossible. We read in the Scriptures : ‘He has announced His words to Jacob and His laws to Israel. Only he who joins the people of Jacob, and becomes united to Israel, can receive in its integrity the word of God and, more particularly, the oral tradition. It is impossible for one who is on the outside. Only he who learns in order to teach, to observe, and to practice, will be able to penetrate into the depths of the sacred lore ; to others it remains a sealed book. Will you, O Emperor, reward a soldier who, in war-time, does not employ his weapons in defence of the Empire ? Circum-

cision is the only gate through which entrance into the palace of the Divine teachings is permissible."

"But what is it that is so extraordinary about these teachings?"

"Mighty Caesar, not only are you Emperor of the world, but you have delved deep in all the sciences. Not only do you dominate people and countries, but with your searching spirit you also master the boundless domain of knowledge. You are not ignorant of the manner in which the Greek philosophers bent all their energies toward the discovery of truth. Pythagoras, the Eleatic School, Socrates, all sought truth; Plato and Aristotle erected magnificent structures of epistemology; but none of them found the truth. The smallest Jewish child, however, as soon as it begins to read the Torah, sees truth at once. It learns that it was one omniscient God who created the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars, who moulded the earth and all its inhabitants, who set bounds to the sea so that it may not pass beyond its shores; the child learns that nothing can happen, neither in Heaven nor on earth, against the will of the Guide and Ruler of the universe."

"You arouse my curiosity, Aquila. Bring one of the Jewish sages into my presence, in order that I may gain a closer acquaintance with this remarkable doctrine and may have myself instructed in matters that have been troubling my mind for many years."

### XXXIII.

#### AT PARTING.

When Aquila returned to his teachers and fellow-students at Usha, he found Rabban Gamaliel, the prince, occupied with preparations for the wedding of his son. Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Akiba had journeyed to Emmaus, in order to make purchases there for the approaching ceremony. But even during this trip, the sages did not cease their studies; Rabbi Akiba, more especially, brought up the weightiest points for discussion by the questions he continually put to the other sages, and so we possess a series of precepts which were laid down in the market-place at Emmaus.\*

The marriage ceremony was solemnized amid great splendor, and all the sages were invited. They sat at the table, and Rabban Gamaliel attended on them, but the sages did not wish to allow him to serve them. Rabbi Joshua, however, said: "We are told in the holy writings that an even greater man served his guests. Our father Abraham was the foremost man in his day, and when the angels visited him, he believed them to be Arabian merchants, idolaters, who worship the dust on their feet; he requested them, therefore, to wash the dust from their feet before they entered his dwelling. Nevertheless, he waited on them, as we read: 'He placed food before them, and he stood near them' (to serve them, of course) 'and they ate.' We find something similar in connection with our master, Moses, for we are told: 'Aaron and all the

\*(Kerethoth 15a, and ff.).

elders of Israel came to eat at the home of Moses' father-in-law, in the presence of God.' Whither had Moses disappeared? Was he not present at the repast? Surely he was present, but he was not sitting at the table, he was standing nearby and serving the guests; and shall we not permit our great Rabban Gamaliel to wait on us?"

Then up spoke Rabbi Zadok: "How long will you glorify men and be mindless of the honor of God? The Holy One blessed be He, serves the entire world. He causes the winds to blow, gathers the clouds and sends the rain down, thereby making the grain grow: He prepares nourishment for each individual; not for scholars alone, but also for the ignorant; not only for the pious, but even for the sinful; not solely for the God-fearing, but even for idol-worshippers; and should you not permit Rabban Gamaliel to attend the wisest and best men of Israel?"<sup>1</sup>

A short time after Rabban Gamaliel had experienced the happiness of celebrating the marriage ceremony of his son, he fell ill. At that time, it was the custom in Israel to display great extravagance in the preparation of clothes for the dead. Large sums of money were expended on magnificent garments in which to clothe the corpses. In these expenditures, one wished to outdo the other, so that the burial of the dead became a heavy burden upon the survivors, and some attempted to escape this duty. Rabban Gamaliel gave orders that if he should die, he should be buried in the very plainest of white linen garments; and this has remained the custom in Israel down to our own day. The richest and most prominent leader, as well as the most insignificant beggar,—all are buried in simple shrouds of white linen.

<sup>1</sup>cf. Kedushin 32b; Mechilta to Jethro.

The sad news of the death of Rabban Gamaliel deeply distressed all who heard it. When the ram's-horn sounded announcing the death of the prince, the report flew swiftly throughout the world, and people flocked from all directions to pay the last honors to the father of his people.

Aquila saw to it that the funeral procession of Rabban Gamaliel, although, in accordance with his express desire, the prince was buried in simple shrouds, should be very imposing. It was the Jewish custom that at the funeral of a king or a prince, costly raiment and other precious objects should be burned. We find this custom mentioned even in the Bible (Jeremiah XXXIV; 5). Aquila (as we are told in *Aboda Zara*, 11a) spent seven thousand pieces of gold on the funeral of Rabban Gamaliel.

Rabbi Elieser, too, became ill. When they heard of this, Rabbi Tarphon, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Akiba, hastened to his home, in order to take care of him. Rabbi Elieser was suffering severe pain and, when he saw the Rabbis, he said. "God is very angry with us." All began to weep; the face of Rabbi Akiba alone was transfigured by a joyous smile. In amazement they asked him: "Why are you laughing?" Whereupon, he, in turn, asked them: "Why are you weeping?" And they answered: "We behold the terrible suffering which the man who has studied the entire sacred lore must endure; should we not weep?" To which Rabbi Akiba replied: "It is for that very reason that I rejoice. Our master was favored by fortune for many long years; he succeeded in everything that he undertook, and his prosperity increased from day to day. The thought once occurred to me: perhaps my teacher is receiving in this world the recompense for his pious deeds. But now that

I see that he, too, must suffer pain, I know that he is paying while he is on earth, the penalty for the sins he committed, and that he will enter upon a life of eternal happiness ; consequently, I am rejoiced."

Then Rabbi Tarphon spoke up: "Rabbi Elieser, your efforts in behalf of Israel were more potent than the fructifying rain; for the rain grants the means only for earthly subsistence; but you have taught how eternal life may be obtained. When the Temple was destroyed, a drought threatened to attack Israel, which would have strangled every shoot, every budding plant. But you caused the spring of the Divine teachings to gush forth, and as the rain drops down from Heaven, scattering life and fertility, so did you resuscitate and show him the way to acquire life in this world and the next."

Rabbi Joshua, in his turn, said: "Rabbi Elieser, your activity in behalf of Israel was more potent than that of the sun. When the Temple was destroyed, Israel seemed to become enveloped in a cloud. But you stepped forth, like the glowing sun, revivifying and giving warmth to your people from the rays of the Divine teachings. The darkness was effaced by the light that you shed, and the night of despair receded. The sun ripens only terrestrial fruits, which make life possible on earth. But you have illumined the paths which we have to walk on earth and which lead into the fragrant fields of paradise."

Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah then said: "Rabbi Elieser, you have filled the place of father and mother for Israel. When the Temple was destroyed, our people was orphaned, as the prophet Jeremiah had foretold: 'We have become like children who are fatherless.' It was at this critical moment that you appeared, as a father for your people. With paternal affection, with the tenderness

which a loving mother displays for her children, you rescued, preserved, and guarded the treasures of the Divine teachings for your children, your people, and you re-distributed these treasures lavishly. A man is indebted to his parents only for having given him earthly life, but to you we are indebted for being able to live in this world in such a manner that we may deserve the future world."

And Rabbi Akiba added these words, "Valuable are sufferings." At this, Rabbi Elieser called to those about him: "Support me, so that I may sit up and hear the words of my pupil Akiba, who has just said: 'Valuable are sufferings.'"

When he had risen to a sitting posture, he asked: "How do you know that, Akiba?"

"I have learned it from the Scriptures," replied Rabbi Akiba. "Despite the extremely painstaking instruction which King Manasseh had received from his father, Hezekiah, he did not follow in the latter's footsteps, but did what was evil in the eyes of the Eternal; even the word of God, uttered by the mouth of the prophet, was not able to improve him. Therefore, God afflicted him with suffering; he was led in chains into captivity by the king of Assyria and most cruelly maltreated. He then took counsel with himself, humbled himself before the God of his fathers and prayed to Him; God heard his voice and restored him to his throne in Jerusalem. Then Manasseh realized that the Eternal is the only God. From these events we learn how valuable and beneficent sufferings actually are."

"Do you mean to say by this," asked Rabbi Elieser, "that I have committed some sin which I am now expiating?"

"Rabbi," answered Rabbi Akiba, "you yourself taught me that there is no living being, no matter how pious he may be and how much good he does, who does not commit at least one sin." (Sanhedrin 101a).

A few days later, the Rabbis were informed that Rabbi Elieser was swiftly nearing his end. It was the day before the Sabbath. The Rabbis seated themselves at a distance of four cubits from the sick-bed; for the ex-communication had not yet been lifted from Rabbi Elieser. As evening was approaching, Hyrcanus, the son of Rabbi Elieser, came to remove his father's phylacteries before the beginning of the Sabbath. But the invalid restrained him; whereupon Hyrcanus said to the Rabbis: "My father seems to be unconscious." When Rabbi Elieser heard this, he exclaimed: "Your mind is confused, as is that of your mother, that you are concerned about my phylacteries despite the fact that the Sabbath lights are not yet kindled! Do you wish to postpone the kindling of the lights until the Sabbath has actually begun and thereby commit a capital offence?"

When the Rabbis saw that he was still in complete possession of his senses, they made their presence known to him; seeing them, he asked: "Why have you come?" To which they replied: "In order to study the Torah." "Why did you not come sooner?" "We had no time." And Rabbi Elieser said: "You will have to expiate by a violent death the sin which you have committed through neglecting to study with me."

"I, too?" asked Rabbi Akiba. 

"Your death will be worse than that of the others; for your heart is as broad as the hall of the Temple, and you could still have learned much from me."

Then, laying his two arms over his heart, Rabbi Elieser cried out: "Woe to you, my two arms, you resemble closed scrolls of the Law which no one reads. I have learned and taught much of the Torah. I learned a great deal and yet scarcely received as much from the lips of one of my teachers as a dog who drinks from the sea; I have taught much and my pupils did not receive any more than does a paint-brush which is dipped into a pot of colors. I know three hundred laws concerning the spot of leprosy, about which no one has ever addressed me a query; I have amassed three thousand rules with regard to the secret science, concerning which no one ever questioned me, with the single exception of Akiba ben Joseph."

The Rabbis then put difficult questions to the invalid, all of which he answered; as he was answering the last question, with the word "Clean," he expired. And Rabbi Joshua exclaimed: "His soul departed hence in purity; the ban of excommunication has been lifted."

Rabbi Elieser had died in Caesarea; at the close of the Sabbath, his body was borne to Lydda, to be buried there. Rabbi Akiba followed the corpse with bitter lamentations, and cried out, as had the prophet Elisha, when Elijah was being borne to Heaven, "'My father, my father, chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!' You have fought and struggled for us, and your prayer provided us with greater protection than could mighty armies! Ah, I had much yet to ask you; but he who alone could have answered me has irrevocably departed!"

More than a half-century has sped by since the beginning of our narrative. Rachel, the wife of Rabbi Akiba, had become old and feeble, while her husband, despite his advanced age, still retained the vigor of youth.

Rachel felt that the moment of her dissolution was at hand, and she took leave of her husband, thanking him for all the love that he had shown her. Death stole over her softly; she was mourned and lamented by her husband, her children, and all Israel. Rabbi Akiba, in delivering the funeral address, applied to her the concluding sentences of the celebrated last chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

“Power and glory are her raiment, and she smiles in anticipation of her end. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the law of love is upon her tongue. Carefully she watches over her household, nor does she ever eat the bread of idleness. Her sons rise and extol her; her husband praises her. Many of the daughters of Israel have achieved deeds of renown, but thou hast surpassed them all. Physical charm is deceptive and beauty is vain; only the woman who feareth God may deem herself praiseworthy. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her deeds laud her in the gates!”

The wound which the death of his beloved wife had inflicted upon him had not yet healed, when additional misfortune came upon Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Simeon, his second son, who had become one of the foremost sages in Israel, fell ill. Slowly the poison of the malady consumed his body; but his mind remained unaffected. Rabbi Simeon ben Akiba did not cease studying and teaching until he had drawn his last breath. When he was dead, all Israel came to console Rabbi Akiba.

“My friends,” said Rabbi Akiba to them, “you have flocked hither from all parts of the Holy Land and the adjacent provinces in order to condole with me in my hour of trial; the husbandman has left his fields, the artisan his workshop, the teacher his school, in order to honor

the beloved dead and me. Who am I, to deserve such honor? How many Akiba ben Josephs are there not on the street? The high honor, however, is meant, not for me, but for the teachings of God which I am fortunate enough to be able to present and to explain. Return, then, in peace to your homes!"

The love and reverence which were felt for Rabbi Akiba can hardly be described. On one occasion, for instance, several of his pupils were waylaid and plundered by robbers. But when the latter learned that their victims were pupils of Rabbi Akiba, they said: "Far be it from us to inflict losses upon the pupils of that great and holy man." They returned all that they had stolen and served as a bodyguard to the pupils as far as their destination.

## XXXIV.

### SAGE AND EMPEROR.

Emperor Hadrian had again taken up his residence in Athens, the city which he preferred above all other cities. From here he sent a messenger to Judaea, to command his nephew, Aquila, to appear before him in the company of one of the leading sages of Israel. Accordingly, Rabbi Joshua and Aquila set out to appear before the ruler of the entire world.

The Emperor was at that time particularly engrossed in the study of the natural sciences. When Aquila introduced Rabbi Joshua to him as the foremost sage in Israel, Hadrian asked:

"On what science are you best informed?"

"Our sacred lore," answered Rabbi Joshua, "reveals to us everything in the world that is worth being known."

"How long," queried the Emperor, "does the hen need to hatch an egg?"

"Twenty-one days, and it takes just as long for the edible fruit to develop from the blossom of the hazel-nut bush."

"How much time does a female dog need to cast her young?"

"Fifty days, and it takes just as long for the fig to ripen."

"And the cat?"

"Fifty-two days; the mulberry attains to maturity in the same period of time."

"And the pig?"

"Sixty days, as with the apple-tree."

"And the fox?"

"Six months, as in the case of grain."

"The sheep and the goat?"

"Five months, the same as the vine."

"The horse, the camel, and the ass?"

"A whole year, as the date-tree."

"And the cow?"

"Nine months, like the olive-tree."

"And how is it with the beasts of prey?"

"The she-wolf, the lioness, the she-bear, the panthers, leopards, elephants, and giraffes need three years, just as do the white figs. The basilisk bears only once in seventy years, in which it resembles the carob-tree; and, in both cases, three years are necessary for the off-spring to reach full maturity."

"And the serpent?"

"The serpent is accursed of God, and, alone among all the creatures, needs seven years for the embryonic development of its progeny."

"But the Athenian sages assert that the serpent needs only three years."

"They are in error."

"But they have acquired their knowledge by the method of experiment."

"Nevertheless, I still insist that they are in error."

"Do you believe that you are wiser than the sages of Athens, the wisest men of all the world?"

"Their wisdom is obtained only through investigation and experience; but our wisdom has its source in God, the Creator of Heaven and earth. He revealed Himself to us and gave us His holy teachings, in which all knowledge is contained."

"Was it revealed to you how long the serpent needs for gestation?"

"This, too, is contained in the Torah. We read in the Scriptures: 'The Eternal said to the serpent: "Because Thou hast done this, be thou accursed above all cattle and all beasts."' Since the ratio between the time of maturation of the embryo of one animal and another, of the cat to the ass, is as that of fifty-days to one year, or, if reduced to its lowest terms, as one to seven, there is a similar ratio between the ass and the serpents; consequently, the serpent needs seven years to mature its egg."

"If you are wiser than the sages of Athens, show your superiority in an actual contest with them; but know that if you fail to answer one of their questions, you are liable to the penalty of death."

The sages of Athens belonged to the school of Sophists, and addressed all kinds of sophistic questions to Rabbi Joshua.

"Tell us," said these sages, "if a man woos a woman and fails to win her, how would it be possible for him to conceive the notion of wooing another woman of higher station?"

Rabbi Joshua took a nail and tried to drive it into the lower part of the wall, but he did not succeed. He then reached higher and found a spot which the nail could enter.

"In the same way," said Rabbi Joshua, "the man to whom you refer, seeks and finds the mate who has been allotted to him by destiny."

The question of the Sophists was a reflection upon the relation of Israel to his God. We read in the Scriptures: "The Eternal came from Sinai, rose up from Seir, shone forth from Mount Paran." Before He revealed

Himself to Israel, God had offered the Torah to other nations, and they had refused to accept it. "Does this not prove," asked the Athenian sages, "that Israel is smaller and less important than the other peoples? He who cannot obtain the high-born wife, must take one of humble station." But Rabbi Joshua likened the Torah to a nail which serves as a support for all people. It cannot be driven in low down; only higher up can it fulfill its purpose.

"How should a man," the sages asked further, "who has lent money to another and recovers it only with difficulty, by means of a lawsuit, be foolish enough to lend again?"

"A man," replied Rabbi Joshua, "went to a swamp and cut a load of reeds, but found no one to help him place the heavy load upon his back. He continued, therefore, since he wished neither to lessen his load nor to stand there idly, to cut reeds, and added them to the load, until, finally, someone came and helped him to place it upon his shoulders."

This is the old question that is put to us again and again. God gave Israel the Promised Land and Israel had been unable to retain it. He gave Israel the Torah and Israel had been unwilling to observe its sacred commandments. Is it to be assumed that God will again choose a people which could not meet even proper claims upon it? But Rabbi Joshua replied that the time will come when the divinely appointed redeemer will lift the heavy burden on our shoulders, and we shall bear it easily. Until then, we live for our task of studying the Torah and of penetrating ever deeper into its meaning.

"Tell us a jest," continued the sages.

"We had a mule," replied Rabbi Joshua, "that had a foal. Around its neck the mother tied a document which stated that it would have to collect a hundred thousand gold pieces for the household of its father."

"Can a mule procreate?" asked the sages.

"It was only a jest," returned Rabbi Joshua.

The wise expounders of the Talmud find in this question and in the answer to it a reflection upon the new doctrine (Christianity) which, at that time, was gaining widespread favor. It seemed but small and insignificant to the Greek philosophers, and, therefore, they asked information concerning it in the guise of a jest. Rabbi Joshua compared it to an animal that was the result of cross-breeding, because that doctrine was the progeny of Judaism and paganism in unholy wedlock.

"If salt threatens to become foul," asked the sages, "how is it to be salted?"

"With the young of a mule," replied Rabbi Joshua.

"Can a mule have young?"

"Can salt become foul?" asked Rabbi Joshua in turn.

Israel is the salt of the earth, for God entered into an ever-lasting covenant of salt with it. This covenant is indissoluble. The "old covenant" remains eternally new and will never be replaced by a "new covenant." Salt cannot become foul, and, consequently, no other substance is necessary to preserve it.

The Athenian sages hurled many additional questions at the head of the wise Judaeans, all of which he answered satisfactorily or triumphantly repulsed. Emperor Hadrian was enraptured by the wisdom of the great teacher of the Jews. He determined to become more closely acquainted with Judaism and to have himself instructed in its essentials. The doctrine of the one, all-

powerful, invisible God seemed to him incomprehensible. He demanded to see God. At this, Rabbi Joshua bade him gaze into the sun and said:

“If you cannot look one of his many servants full in the face, without averting your almost blinded eyes, how do you expect to be able to see the Lord of the universe Himself?”

## XXXV.

### THE CRANE IN THE LION'S MAW.

Jubilant happiness prevailed in Judaea. The Emperor had promised to come to Palestine and to have the Temple rebuilt. A spirit of enthusiasm took possession of old and young, of great and small. The Roman Emperor was compared to the Persian King, Cyrus, and dreams of a resuscitation of the Jewish state were rife.

The Emperor came to Bithynia, with Rabbi Joshua and Aquila in his train. In the little town of Claudopolis, the inhabitants crowded about to see the Emperor and to show him divine honors. Suddenly the Emperor's eye was riveted upon a handsome youth.

"Do you see that lad?" he said to his kinsman, Lucius Aurelius Verus, who was accompanying him. "I seem to be gazing upon an Apollo, carved by the masterly hand of Praxiteles. How gloriously soft and yet powerful is every muscle of his neck! What a breast! Not even the imagination of the most skilful artist could conceive one so beautiful and so strong! What arms, what legs! And, as the climax, this divine countenance! No human being's face could be moulded more symmetrically!"

"I admire your taste, O Caesar," replied Verus: "There has surely never been a handsomer youth on earth! He is Ganymede and Apollo at the same time!"

The Emperor beckoned the lad to him.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Antinous," replied the boy in a wonderfully melodious voice.

The Emperor was literally devouring him with his eyes.

"Antinous," he said, "you shall, from this day on, be mine,—my friend, my companion, my son. I shall give you everything that your heart may desire—gold, silver, precious stones, houses, gardens, vineyards, fields and forests; but you must be mine, your entire soul must belong to me. Beginning with this moment, you have neither father nor mother, neither sister nor brother,—I shall abundantly fill the places of all of these. I shall feast my eyes on your beauty, and not permit you to leave my side a single moment. But I shall not enrich you alone; your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters, shall become my beneficiaries. Let them step forward."

They approached; the Emperor lavished large sums of money upon them. Then he ordered them to take leave of their son and brother, and to forfeit all claim upon him. Thereupon, the Emperor's servants led the youth to the baths and rubbed him with fragrant ointments. After having clad him in costly raiment, they brought him into the presence of the Emperor.

On the next day, Aquila approached the Emperor, an expression of deep sadness on his countenance.

"Ha." called out Hadrian, "you come to rebuke me, to tell me that, according to the precepts of Judaism, my love for that reproduction of divinity, the magnificent Antinous, in whom the gods have incarnated beauty, is sinful. What do I care for your Judaism! I laugh at it. I myself am a god, and divine bliss courses through my being in my love for the lad whom the gods fashioned especially for me. Go, and tell the old man, too, not to appear before me again."

With bowed head, Aquila departed; their hearts heavy with sadness, he and Rabbi Joshua returned to Judaea.

Henceforth, Hadrian was the most relentless enemy of the Jews and of Judaism the world has ever known. He appointed Tinius Rufus governor of Judaea; he ordered that the temple mount be ploughed up and that a temple for the worship of idols, a shrine of Jupiter Capitolinus, be erected. Even the name of Jerusalem was to disappear, for the devastated city, from that time, was to bear the Emperor's family name and be called Aelia Capitolina.

Tinius Rufus executed the Emperor's command on the ninth of the month Ab. Despair seized upon the entire Jewish people, which had been plunged from the highest pinnacle of expectation into the very abyss of misery. So great, indeed, was the despair that many contemplated suicide. At this crucial moment, Rabbi Joshua stood forward as an angel of consolation. He comforted the people by means of a parable (Midrash Bereshith Rabba, Chap. 64):

"The lion, king of the beasts," he told them, "once swallowed a bone, which had become lodged in his throat. The crane stepped up, thrust his head into the jaws of the lion, and drew out the bone with his long bill. The lion had escaped the danger of strangulation, and the crane demanded his reward. The king of beasts said: 'You thrust your head unmolested into the jaws of the lion, you draw it out unharmed, and you still demand a reward? Are you not satisfied that you escaped the jaws and the sharp teeth of the lion with your life?' We, too,

<sup>1</sup>The Jewish sources always refer to him as Turnus Rufus, whereas, according to Roman and Greek authors, his name was Tinius or Tinnius.

my brothers, have had to thrust our heads into the lion's maw. What would have become of us and of the religion of our father's, if Hadrian had become a proselyte to Judaism? He would have capriciously altered and moulded our faith until nothing would have remained of it. Let us, therefore, offer thanks to God, our omnipotent Father and Protector, that we have escaped the lion's maw uninjured."

The wrath of the Emperor vented itself also upon his nephew Aquila. He gave orders to have him arrested, and soldiers were sent to seize him (Aboda Zara 11a).

The henchmen of Tinius Rufus surrounded the house of Aquila in Usha at night, dragged him from his bed, and hurried him away. As he was being carried along in this manner by the Roman soldiers in the silence of the dark night, he said to them:

"My friends, the general custom is that the menial should on dark nights bear a torch or a lantern before the aristocrat. The legionary carries a light before the master of the horse, he before the commander of the legion, he before the governor of the province, and he before the proconsul, who deems it an honor to be permitted to light up the way for the Emperor. Have you ever heard of a king who carried a torch before his people and illuminated the road upon which his subjects and troops were to walk?"

The legionaries stopped in their tracks, and listened in wonderment to these words.

"No," said their leader, "I have never heard of any such thing."

"Then hear, my friends," said Aquila. "Once a tribe was enslaved and oppressed in Egypt. The Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, liberated this tribe by af-

flicting the oppressors with numerous plagues. The hitherto subject people marched from the land of slavery into freedom before the eyes of all. By day, the Eternal, the one God, preceded them in a pillar of cloud, by night in a pillar of fire, to show them the way, that they might advance both by day and by night. This tribe is the Jewish nation, of which I have become a member, and, because I have joined it, my uncle, the Emperor, wishes to punish me. As the Almighty once lit up the way for the Jews, when they, more than a thousand years ago, were departing from Egypt, he still carries a torch before them on every dark night. He revealed Himself to this people, gave it His sacred laws, and shows it the way whereon it should walk day and night. The life of the Jew does not end with death; God has prepared a more beautiful life in the future world, in life after death. We shall then enter His holy palace, where eternal light and joy reside."

The soldiers were deeply moved by what they had heard.

"Oh, if we could only receive a share of this eternal joy!" said the leader.

"You can," put in Aquila, "if you follow my example and embrace Judaism. Return with me to Usha; I shall take you into my house, and teach you the word of God."

And they returned with him, Aquila became their teacher; the leader and all his soldiers had themselves circumcised, and became devout Jews.

The friends of Aquila advised him to flee and to remain in concealment, as the Emperor, presumably, would reiterate his order of imprisonment. But Aquila said:

"God can protect me as well here as anywhere else. If it is His plan that the Emperor shall put me to death, the Emperor's men will discover me in the most secret

recess. But if the Almighty wishes to protect me, I am as safe in my house at Usha as in a rocky cavern by an impenetrable mountain pass."

When Hadrian learned that his attempt to have his nephew taken prisoner had failed and that soldiers who had been entrusted with the task had embraced Judaism, his rage knew no bounds. He repeated his command that soldiers be sent to arrest Aquila, who was to be forbidden, on pain of death, to enter into a conversation with them.

Tinius Rufus impressed the order of the Emperor upon the soldiers who were to make up the expedition, and placed at their head one of his most trusted officers. They, too, arrived at Usha by night, surrounded and entered the house of Aquila, who was awakened and ordered to dress himself and to follow them. Aquila did as he was bidden. When he crossed the threshold of his house, he placed his hand upon the Mezuzah and kissed it.

"What are you doing there?" asked the leader of the soldiers.

"I am kissing the Mezuzah," replied Aquila.

"What does that mean?"

"Every king remains within his palace, while outside, the guards stand with drawn swords to protect his head, the life of the monarch. But not our King, the King of all kings, the God of Israel, praised be His name. His servants dwell peacefully within their homes and enjoy strengthening sleep. But he sleepeth not, the Sentinel of Israel, neither doth He slumber. He commanded us to write His name on the door-posts of our houses; then he guards and protects us."

"Is there nothing besides the name of God in this little case?"

"It also contains the exhortation that we should love the one God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole wealth, and that we should observe His teachings by day and by night."

"What recompense does your God give you for this?"

"He grants us His protection during our earthly careers and, after death, He leads our immortal souls into the blissful abode of eternal salvation."

In amazement, the legionaries listened to the words of Aquila.

"Be our guide and teacher," said the captain to Aquila, "so that we, too, may some day receive a portion of the eternal life which God has promised to His children."

Then captain as well as soldiers had themselves circumcised and embraced Judaism. Hadrian gave up his attempts to take his nephew prisoner. Henceforth Aquila lived undisturbed.

## XXXVI.

### THE GOLD CASKET.

Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah had died, and, while all Israel was bewailing his demise, the report of another death filled every heart with terror and sadness; for Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, too, had ended his beneficent career.

Rabbi Akiba was now the greatest and most prominent man in Israel, not only with reference to knowledge and ability, but also as regards external appearance; he was actually the prince of his people, even though he did not assume this title, which was being held in abeyance for the then very young son of Rabban Gamaliel, Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel. The latter, at that time, was attending the school at Bethar, the city which, after the fall of Jerusalem, had swiftly risen to the position of capital of the land.

In the meantime, the Roman governor, Tinius Rufus, was raging most furiously against all that bore the Jewish name. Men and women were compelled to worship images of the Emperor and to sacrifice to them. Whoever refused to do this was executed after the most terrible tortures. The innocent blood of two distinguished men, Rabbi Simeon ben Nathaniel and Rabbi Ishmael, was shed at the order of Tinius Rufus. When Rabbi Simeon and Rabbi Ishmael were being led to their death, the latter wept bitterly. Rabbi Simeon said to him: "O noble man, father and leader of Israel, only two steps separate you from the company of the pious in paradise, wherefore, then, do you weep?" And Rabbi Ishmael

answered: "I am not weeping because I must die, but because of the sins which I must have committed, that the all-just God, the Rock who is perfection and whose ways are the acme of uprightness, the God of truth in Whom there is no wrong, delivers me to a violent death. Can I have violated the Sabbath or committed murder, that the fate of execution overtakes me?" "Rabbi," said Rabbi Simeon, "you know that God judges most severely the pious among His children. Perhaps someone came to have you clear up a doubt in his mind on a point of the law and, because you may have been eating or sleeping, your servant sent him away, so that, weary of questioning, the stranger decided to follow the more rigorous interpretation of the law.<sup>1</sup> If you have committed even so insignificant a sin as this, you must now atone for it with death, so that you may possess eternal bliss in its completeness." Rabbi Ishmael then dried his eyes, and he and his pious colleague cheerfully bared their heads to the sword of the Roman executioner.

Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Judah ben Baba were standing in the open field, giving instruction to the thousands

<sup>1</sup>Compare Sanhedrin 11 a, and tractate Semachoth, Chap. 8. To the first of these passages, Rashi comments that the two men who were tortured to death were Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel I, and Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, the high-priest; but this is impossible, since Samuel the Younger, who, at the hour of his death, prophesied their execution, was a contemporary of Rabban Gamaliel of Jabneh. In the second passage, we read: "Rashbag," but this must also be an error, as Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel I died before the destruction of the Temple and as it is highly improbable that Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Judah ben Baba delivered orations at his funeral. On the other hand, Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel II was then still a child, as we have already seen; he certainly did not die a violent death. We conjecture, therefore, that the martyr referred to here is Rabbi Simeon ben Nathaniel. The passage in Sanhedrin does not contradict this, and, in the second passage, a "Gimel" can easily have been put in the place of a "Nun" by a careless copyist.

of their pupils assembled about them. When the sad news arrived, all rent their garments and began to weep aloud; and Rabbi Akiba exclaimed: "Weep, my brothers, my friends, weep, not for those who have been slain, but for the horrors that threaten all of us. If we had happiness to expect, Simeon and Ishmael would not have been taken away. They would have remained alive to participate in the general rejoicing. But we face gloomy times, terrible things impend, and, therefore, these pious men have been carried off, so that they might not behold the approaching misery. My brothers, let us take to heart the death of these noble men. Let us examine and search out our ways and return to the Lord our God, in order that the saying of the prophet be not applied to us: 'The upright man is lost from our midst, and no one takes it to heart.' My pupils, my sons, it is true that you are pious and good and that you devote your days and nights to the study of the Divine teachings; but many of you are haughty, because of the wisdom you have acquired; you exalt yourselves above your colleagues, and one does not show sufficient respect to the other. Take it to heart, my sons, and banish pride and haughtiness. If you practice introspection and take as your models the humble and modest teachers of Israel who have just had to die, those two noble men will have rescued you from the impending catastrophe; another prophetic utterance will then have been fulfilled: 'Peace will come about because those men rest in their graves.' "

Thus spake Rabbi Akiba; but his admonition fell on deaf ears. Soon a malignant disease broke out and carried away many of his disciples, upon whom rested the hopes of Israel. Saddened and terrified, the nation saw the very flower of its youth wither up and die. Despair

took possession of all hearts, and the synagogues were constantly filled with worshippers.

It was during the period of the counting of Omer, the time between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. Each additional day of Omer, the terrible malady grew more virulent, the malady which chose as its victims the most promising youths of Israel.

The sorrow was general, all joy had vanished from Israel; no holiday was celebrated, no marriage contracted, until, on the thirty-third day of Omer, God heard the prayers of His people and brought the vicious plague to an end. Ever since, the period of Omer has remained a time of mourning, during which pleasures are avoided and marriages not contracted. The thirty-third day of Omer, however, the eighteenth day of the month Iyar, has been instituted as a day of rejoicing.

Rabbi Akiba was not only the teacher, he was also the father of his pupils. When so many young men met their death prematurely, he took under his protection their widows and orphans, to shelter them from want! But the means which are necessary for so ambitious an undertaking could not be so easily procured. All Judaea had been impoverished by the exactions of the Roman governor; it was impossible to levy a tax; but the need was so urgent that speedy relief was imperative. Rabbi Akiba sacrificed a large part of his own fortune; but at least one hundred thousand gold pieces were required.

By the shore of the sea, not far from Jaffa, a high-born Roman lady inhabited a beautiful villa, which she herself had caused to be constructed at this spot. Paulla Veturia had made the acquaintance of the Jewish sages in Rome; she had diligently studied the Scriptures, and after the death of her husband, had journeyed to Pales-

tine in order there to be closer to the Jewish teachers. Here she had a country home erected, and she occupied it with her large household of man-servants and maid-servants. Paulla Veturia was exceedingly wealthy. Rabbi Akiba, therefore, visited her, with the intention of requesting of her a loan of the hundred thousand gold pieces which were necessary for the relief of the stricken. The Roman lady received the sage of Israel joyfully.

"Welcome, Rabbi" said she. "How happy I am to see you once more!"

"Do not rejoice too soon, noble lady," replied Rabbi Akiba. "I am about to put your confidence in me to a severe test. You have probably heard that a malevolent epidemic carried off a large number of my pupils. Thousands of widows and orphans have lost their bread-winners, and are now exposed to death by starvation, if immediate assistance is not forthcoming. Our means are exhausted. In order to combat the suffering, we need one hundred thousand gold pieces."

"And you are collecting money for that purpose, Rabbi? I, too, shall give a contribution."

"Noble lady, you cannot aid us with a mere contribution. I have come to ask you to advance me the entire sum. God will send us the means of repaying you within a year's time."

"You request much, Rabbi. A hundred thousand gold pieces is a sum the loss of which would plunge even me into poverty."

"The money will bear invaluable interest for you. The many human lives which you will be veritably snatching from death will procure eternal life for you. I beseech you, do not refuse my request, for I know not to whom else to turn."

"What security can you offer me?"

"I offer myself and all my fortune as security, and, if you demand it, I shall procure ten additional responsible guarantors."

"The security does not correspond to the magnitude of the sum desired. Look at the boundless sea out there. Can you count its waves? And yet, there may be far less than a hundred thousand. No, for so much money you must have many other guarantors. If you can promise me that the God of Israel and the sea will serve as guarantors, I shall entrust to you the stupendous sum of money."<sup>1</sup>

"As you have spoken, so be it; let God and the sea guarantee that I shall repay the amount at the expiration of a year."

Rabbi Akiba took the money, assisted the widows and orphans, and delivered many from death by starvation. A part of the money he put out at interest and collected these debts within a few months. To make up the deficit, Rabbi Akiba placed a tax upon all prosperous Jews, and, even before the day of settlement approached, he had the entire amount in his hands. But suddenly a severe illness attacked him, a violent fever overcame him, and he was confined to his bed unconscious.

When the time for settlement arrived, Paulla Veturia awaited impatiently the visit of Rabbi Akiba. Noon came, and no Rabbi; the sun was about to set—neither Akiba nor a messenger from him appeared. Then the Roman lady left her house and ran despairingly along the shore of the sea.

"Almighty," she cried out, "I trusted to Thy security. Shall my confidence be put to naught? Command the sea

<sup>1</sup>Nedarim 50a; cf. Rashi, Rabenu Tam, and Rab Nissim.

to give up its treasures and to return me my property!"

At these words, she fixed her gaze upon the sea. What was that? A beautiful casket, adorned with gold and jewels, was dancing on the waves. Within a few moments, it was washed ashore and lay at her feet. She wished to pick it up, but it was too heavy. She had to call out her servants, who bore it into the house.

Only with exceeding difficulty could the tightly-locked casket be opened. Within it were lying one hundred thousand gold-pieces.

"God has performed a miracle," exclaimed Paulla Veturia, "praised be His holy name!"

Whence had the casket with its contents come? The next chapters will divulge the secret.

## XXXVII.

### THE UNNATURAL MONARCH.

In the year 129 of the common era, Emperor Hadrian journeyed to Alexandria; he was accompanied thither by his entire court; his wife, Sabina, had preceded him, and had established her residence in the Caesareum, the most magnificent palace in the Egyptian capital. Here, too, rooms were set in order for the Emperor, whose arrival was expected hourly.

Sabina was sitting upon a large easy-couch which resembled a bed rather than a chair. Her feet were sunk deep in the shaggy hide of a bison, and her limbs rested upon silken cushions. Her head was held stiffly erect. It was difficult to believe that her thin neck could support her head and the ropes of pearls and chains of jewels which were interwoven in the coiffure of her auburn tresses piled high in the shape of long cylinders. The emaciated face of the Empress seemed especially small under the mass of natural and artificial adornments that covered her brow and the crown of her head. The eyes from which all trace of eye-lashes were absent, seemed, despite the dark strokes of the brush along their edges, preposterously tiny. Sabina had never been beautiful, and Hadrian had never loved her. He had married her because she was the niece of Emperor Trajan, because his patroness, Empress Plotina, had wished it, and because he had hoped to gain, by reversion, the imperial purple. Since Hadrian had picked up in Bithynia the handsome Antinous, whom he idolized, the relations be-

tween husband and wife had become strained almost to the point of breaking. Hadrian and Sabina had no children. The Empress lavished all her love upon her nephew, the praetor, Lucius Aurelius Verus. As Plotina before her had obtained the imperial crown for her nephew Hadrian, so Sabina intended to elevate Verus, who was an exceedingly amiable and cultured man. Verus, however, was extremely dissolute and was wasting his youthful energy in such a way that, even then, people foretold but a short life for him.

The prefect of Egypt, Titianus, had himself announced in the chamber of the Empress. When he appeared before her, he bowed low, and took hold of Sabina's richly bejewelled right hand, which she withdrew after but a fleeting touch.

"What is the trouble?" she asked.

"A courier," replied the prefect, "brought me a letter this morning in which the Emperor declares that he desires to make his headquarters in the old palace on the Lochias, not here in the Caesareum."

At these words, Sabina's brow became ruffled, her eyes sank until they were fixed, sorrowful and immovable, upon her lap, and, drawing her lower lip between her teeth, she hissed:

"Because I am living here!"

The Lochias was a castle which one of the Ptolemies had had constructed on a peninsula of the same name; it lay close to the sea, and offered an extensive view.

"I beg of you," continued Sabina, "summon to my side the praetor, Lucius Aurelius Verus."

The prefect departed and performed his errand. Verus soon appeared before the Empress, who had had

her female Greek slave prepare her a goblet of fruit-juice, which she then drank.

Verus approached the matronly Empress and officiously, as an attentive son waiting upon his beloved suffering mother, took from her hand the empty beaker and handed it to the Greek slave. The Empress graciously nodded several times to the praetor, in token of her gratitude, and then commanded the slave to withdraw.

"Lucius," said Sabina, "I have important matters to discuss with you. The disgusting toy which Hadrian picked up in Bithynia estranges him more and more from my heart. He does not wish to reside in the Caesareum because I am here, and he has chosen as his quarters the old, decayed Lochias. You know, Lucius, how I love you and what plans I am maturing for you. You are the only person who is attached to me."

The praetor seized her hand and carried it reverently to his lips.

"You are a second mother to me," he said; "the conquering Venus masters all hearts; mine has belonged to her since early childhood."

Sabina had had herself portrayed in marble as Venus Victrix. When a replica of this statue was set up in Alexandria, a malicious tongue uttered a sentence which soon became very popular with the citizens:

"This Aphrodite" (Greek for Venus) "is certainly victorious; for whoever sees her departs as quickly as he can."

The Alexandrians had judged rightly; but Sabina liked to be portrayed as a conquering Venus and, therefore, she smiled affably at this allusion of Verus.

"My son," she said, "our schemes are in danger of being frustrated; I fear that Hadrian will adopt this Antinous as his son and successor."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Verus.

"What is impossible for a Roman Emperor?"

"He cannot so boldly oppose the wishes of the Senate and the people as to raise to so lofty a station this toy of his whims."

"Hadrian can do whatever he wishes. Therefore, listen to me, Lucius; we must remove this Bithynian from our path."

Verus turned white as chalk.

"Do you forget," said he, "the Emperor's wrath, which would crush all upon whom his suspicions might fall?"

"We must go to work adroitly, so that we ourselves shall not be directly implicated. You are ingenious, Lucius, you must contrive some plan that will bring about what we desire. And now leave me; too much talking wears me out. Send me the slave girl Leucippa."

Verus departed thoughtfully. What Sabina had said seemed to him very wise; it was now a question of devising some scheme whereby to make the Emperor's favorite harmless. No sort of violence must be used; murderers could not be hired to get rid of the Bithynian. At first, therefore, he relinquished the idea of fixing upon a definite plan, but decided to become more closely acquainted with the handsome Antinous, in order to learn the weak side of his character.

A few days later, Hadrian arrived in Alexandria with his courtiers, and established himself in the Lochias. Verus hastened to greet the Emperor, who received his nephew very warmly.

"You come just at the right time, Lucius," he said. "I have a commission for you. Antinous, the favorite of my heart, has for some time been suffering from deep melancholy. It is not at all surprising that a youth, such as he, should not find sufficient pleasure in exclusive association with me, an aging man. I entreat you, therefore, to take charge of him, and to attempt to distract him a little. You know, better than any other, how to enjoy life."

The heart of the praetor leaped with joy. By the Emperor's own proposal, an instrument was offered him whereby the favorite who stood in his way might be made harmless.

Hadrian summoned Antinous, and said to him: "My beloved Antinous, during my sojourn in Alexandria I shall be very much occupied by affairs of state. My relative, the praetor, Lucius Aurelius Verus, will be good enough to show you about this beautiful large city—its palaces, its temples, and its pleasure-resorts. Make good use of your time and be merry, so that the line of sadness and melancholy that has settled upon your divine countenance may vanish."

The Emperor departed; Verus and Antinous were alone.

"Antinous," said the praetor, "hitherto I have not counted you amongst my closest friends; but both share an overpowering emotion; we love the Emperor."

"I certainly do love him," replied the favorite.

"Well, then," said Verus, "you must be as concerned as I to preserve the Emperor's repose and good spirits, which make it possible for him to bear the heavy burdens of government. The Emperor loves you dearly, and you must wear a smiling countenance in his presence.

But that you can do only if you obtain happiness for yourself in whole-hearted enjoyment of life. I am a disciple of Epicurus, who teaches us to derive the greatest possible amount of pleasure from each moment. Follow me; I shall teach you to be merry in a circle of congenial men and women."

Antinous followed the example of Verus and drained to the very lees the cup of joy. He sought and found pleasures of all kinds; but every debauch was succeeded by the disenchantment which always follows over-indulgence. Satiety and disgust took possession of the heart of the youth. He possessed all that a man could possibly desire; his wishes were fulfilled as soon as they were expressed. But there was one thing that he detested to the very bottom of his soul, yet from which there was no liberation—the unnatural vice for which the Emperor made use of him.

The feelings of the favorite did not escape Hadrian; he sought to goad him on and to bind him to himself by other means.

On one occasion, he asked him:

"Are you ambitious, Antinous?"

"No, my lord," replied Antinous.

"By whom does every man especially desire to be styled father?"

"By one whom he loves very much."

"Quite right, and particularly, if such a one is most loyally attached to him. I am a man among men, and you, my beloved, are closest to my heart; I shall bless the day on which I shall be able to give you permission to call me father before all the world. Do not interrupt me. If you master your will completely, consider carefully, as on the chase, the doings of those around you,

endeavor to sharpen your wits and comprehend what I teach you, it is not at all unlikely that Antinous may one day put on the imperial purple in my place."

The favorite was utterly stunned by these words of the Emperor. But his heart did not beat higher at the brilliant prospect that was held out to him. He contented himself with saying:

"May the gods grant you long life, O Caesar, and may Fate not cut the thread of your life until long after the day when the urn shall have received the ashes of Antinous."

"I am a man among men," answered the Emperor, "and it is the course of nature that the older should die before the younger. It would considerably lessen the sadness of my hour of death were I to know that he whom I love most devotedly will be the heir of my honors and my possessions."

### XXXVIII.

#### THE SUICIDE.

Antinous had obtained permission from the Emperor to visit the interior of the country. The praetor Verus and numerous servants accompanied him; among the latter was Mastor, the most faithful servant of the Emperor, who was ordinarily assigned the duty of guarding Hadrian's own person, a task for which his herculean physique particularly qualified him. The Emperor had impressed him, above all things, with the necessity of watching over the safety of his favorite. The goal of the journey was the city of Besa, situated on the Nile.

While Antinous and Verus were riding along on their mules at the head of the procession, the Bithynian said:

"Verus, will you kindly give me instruction? I am an ignorant youth, reared in poor circumstances. Much is obscure to me."

"Speak," answered the praetor, "I shall gladly be of whatever service I can to you."

"You told me recently that it is my duty to show the Emperor a cheerful countenance in order to ease the difficulties and the cares of state for him. Is it, then, so difficult to be Emperor?"

Verus looked at his interlocutor with a penetrating gaze.

"Is that the point on which you desire me to give you information?" he inquired. "Why do you not ask Hadrian? He will be better able to instruct you than I."

"I shall confide something to you. The Emperor has told me that it is his intention to adopt me as his son and to appoint me his successor."

Verus started in terror. How correctly Sabina had judged! The cultured courtier, experienced in all the arts of dissimulation, quickly mastered the feelings of bitterness that surged up within him. In a very amiable manner, he replied to his companion.

"In that case, I must congratulate you, Antinous!"

"That is just what I wish to know of you, whether it is a piece of good fortune to become Emperor."

"Whether it is a piece of good fortune? There is no greater good fortune for ambitious spirits, than to attain to the supreme command, to be a god on earth, to know the entire world at one's feet, to rule and to dominate the entire world. But not every one is adapted to so great a task. For weak souls, rulership would become a burden which would make them miserably unhappy."

"Explain this statement."

"An emperor must, above all, be a military hero. He must be able to place himself at the head of his armies in order to vanquish and subjugate the enemies of the country, to increase the renown of the Empire, and to raise its splendor. If he cannot do this, he will lose *prestige*, and the ambitious generals will gain for themselves the hearts of the soldiers and overthrow the Emperor. Antinous, could you lead an army into the field, invent schemes, plan campaigns, divine the thoughts of the foe?"

"Never."

"An Emperor must be a keen student of human nature. He must test the hearts of those who surround

him, to discover whether they are loyal to him, and he must be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, upright devotion and hypocrisy. He must be able to penetrate the masks of flatterers and to keep traitors far from him. Are you a student of human nature, Antinous?"

"I see through no one and trust everyone."

"The ruler of a vast empire that is composed of many lands and peoples, must have exact knowledge of all the branches of the government, in order that he may entrust the proper men with the various offices. If he cannot do this, he will unsettle the empire and drive the provinces into revolt. He himself will become the toy of conscienceless men, who will mislead him into all kinds of vicious and hateful deeds. He will awaken hatred and conjure up vengeance thereby, so that he will not be sure of his life a single moment. Thus fell Caligula, thus fell Nero, thus fell Domitian—all by the dagger of the assassin. And before they met their death, they trembled every moment, and hovered in mortal dread day and night. Is there a more wretched, a more terrible life than one in which every joy, every satisfaction, is poisoned by the fear of death?"

"No, no, I do not wish to become Emperor. I shall ask Hadrian to abandon his plan."

"Foolish boy, have you ever known Hadrian to be persuaded by the request of an individual to give up what he has determined to do?"

Antinous was silent; he knew that the praetor was right. Thus they rode along in silence, until Antinous pleaded:

"Give me your advice, Verus. How can I escape this miserable fate?"

"If you fear to become a god on earth, make use of that privilege which raises man above the gods."

"I do not understand you."

"Every man has the right to step out of the ranks of the living as soon as non-existence seems to him more endurable than existence and he pleases to summon death. The gods cannot die, so that, in this point, man is superior to them."

"You advise me—?"

"I offer you no advice whatsoever: I have only given you the instruction you demanded of me."

They arrived at Besa, where they spent the night. On the next day, a courier of the Emperor appeared, and summoned back the praetor. Sabina had expressed the wish to see him.

Antinous took leave of Verus. The Bithynian had spent a sleepless night; fear-inspiring phantasies had filled his brain. He saw the dagger of the assassin darting toward him, he beheld before his eyes all the misery which the praetor had painted in such vivid colors the day before. He took Mastor with him for a walk along the bank of the Nile. Before him flowed the majestic stream, which, in the vicinity of Besa, is close to three miles wide. The blue waters were sparkling in the sunlight.

"Oh," said Antinous to himself, "how beautiful, how glorious it must be to seek here the end of all one's cares and sufferings!"

A boat lay by the bank of the stream. Antinous gave it a vigorous push and then jumped, with a swift leap, into the boat. He had already seized the oars, when Mastor called out to him:

"My lord, what are you doing there?"

"Give my greetings to the Emperor," returned Antinous, "he will never see me again."

"Stop, miserable wretch, turn back!" shouted the slave, and threw himself into another boat; but the skiff of the Bithynian, impelled by powerful strokes of the oars, sped more and more swiftly downstream. Mastor plied all his energies in the other boat, but he was unable to overtake the one he was pursuing.

Thus both arrived at midstream in a wild chase. Then the slave saw the oars of the Bithynian fly into the air; he was compelled helplessly to watch the youth sink into the waters.

While this was happening in Besa, the representatives of the Egyptian priesthood had arrived at the Lochias to pay homage to the Emperor. They had brought along a gift of honor, consisting of a hundred thousand gold pieces.

When the Emperor was informed of the presence of the representatives, he had himself clad in the purple and went into the hall of the Muses in order there, surrounded by all his court, to receive the prophets and holy fathers from the various temples of the Nile valley, to be worshipped by them as the offspring of the Sun-god, and to assure them, as well as their religion, of his favor. He granted their request that he consecrate and bless by a visit the temples of the deities which they served. The high-priest of Memphis then handed him the costly, richly begemmed casket of gold which contained the gift of honor. Hadrian received it graciously, and rejoiced in the magnificent gift. Suddenly Mastor rushed into the hall. His hair was dishevelled, fear and anxiety were depicted on his countenance.

"Caesar," he cried, "your Antinous—."

"What has happened? What has happened?" queried the Emperor, panic-stricken.

"He has committed suicide."

The Emperor leaped from the throne, snatched the purple from his shoulders, tore it into shreds, and ran about in the hall as a madman. He seized the casket and hurled it, with superhuman force, through the window and into the sea which seethed at the foot of the Lochias. A violent storm had arisen, lashing the waves furiously; the casket was carried to the very feet of the Roman matron, Paulla Veturia, on the shore at Jaffa.

A night and half a day had passed since the death of the Bithynian. Boats and ships from all sections of the province assembled before Besa in order to seek the corpse of the drowned youth; the shores teemed with human beings, and pitch censers and torches on the river and on land, obscured with their rays the splendor of the moon during the night; but no one had as yet succeeded in finding the beautiful corpse.

Without taking food or drink, the Emperor spent the time in silent brooding. An army of people was swarming about the Lochias, but he had given the strictest orders not to admit anyone, not even his wife. The consolation of tears was denied him, but pain wrung his heart, enshrouded his mind, and made him so sensitive that whenever he heard, even from afar, the voice of an acquaintance, he became restless and enraged.

He gazed fixedly into space and murmured to himself :

"Let all mankind mourn with me !"

At these words, he arose and said in a firm and resolute voice:

"Now I stretch forth my hand; hear me, ye deities: every city in the Empire shall set up an altar to Antinous; I now give to you as your comrade the friend whom you stole from me. Receive him kindly, ye immortal directors of the world! Who of you may boast of being handsomer than he was? Who of you has displayed as much goodness and loyalty as did your new compeer?"

This vow seemed to relieve Hadrian. With firm tread, he paced up and down for at least half an hour. Then he gave orders to summon his confidential secretary, Heliodorus, who set down in black and white what his master dictated to him. This was nothing less than that, henceforth, the world must revere a new god in Antinous. Temples were to be reared in honor of the object of the Emperor's unnatural passion and sacrifices were to be offered up; enslaved and idiotic mankind was to offer up its prayers to him!

All this actually happened. The foremost artists of the empire vied with one another in the production of images of Antinous, which were set up in the newly-built Antinous-temples.

A few weeks after the events that have just been related, Rabbi Akiba recovered from his severe illness. He hastened to visit Paulla Veturia, in order to settle his debt.

"Pardon me," he said, "that I did not meet my obligation on the day it was due; a severe illness confined me to my bed."

She, however, refused the money and said :

“This money belongs to you, your guarantor has already paid the debt.”

And she related to him all that had occurred. (1)

1Compare Nedarim 50a, and the comments of Rashi, Rabbenu Nissim, and Rabbenu Asher on this passage.

## XXXIX.

### FACING THE TYRANT.

After the death of his favorite, Antinous, Emperor Hadrian yielded to the solicitations of his wife, and adopted the praetor, Lucius Aurelius Verus, as his son. But this latter was not destined to wear the purple of the Caesars; it was his son, Marcus Aurelius, surnamed Antoninus, born to him many years later, who was to rule the Roman Empire; and he, too, was to leave a deep impression upon the destinies of the Jewish people, as will be recounted later.

The Emperor's stay in Egypt had been spoiled by the death of his favorite; he returned to Antioch. Here the governor of Palestine, Tinius Rufus, appeared to greet his royal master. At the same time, a deputation, with Rabbi Akiba at its head, was sent by the Jews to complain to the Emperor of the insufferable persecutions and oppressions to which they were exposed.

The Emperor received the great teacher of the Jews very graciously, and lent an attentive ear to his complaints. These culminated in three accusations: Tinius Rufus had forbidden circumcision, he had prohibited the celebration of the Sabbath, and he compelled the Jews to practice idolatry; those who refused were put to death.

Tinius Rufus was summoned before the Emperor. In the presence of Rabbi Akiba, he was to defend the severe regulations which he had imposed upon the Jews.

"Tell me, Jew," began Tinius Rufus; "you worship one god, the sole Creator of heaven and earth; you call Him omniscient, omnipotent, you praise Him as the master Artist and Builder,—now, tell me, whose works are most beautiful, those of the all-powerful, all-wise God or those of men?"<sup>1</sup>

Without considering, Rabbi Akiba replied :

"The works of men."

"Do you know, Jew," returned Tinius Rufus, "what you are saying ? Can men span the vaults of Heaven, set in their places the fiery sun, the friendly moon, and the countless stars, and lead and direct them ? Can men mould the globe of the earth, raise mountains, cause springs to gush forth and become mighty rivers ? Can men produce the sea with all its marvels ?"

"You asked me," replied Rabbi Akiba, "whose works are the more beautiful, those of God or those of men. To that I answered that the works of men are the more beautiful. I did not mean to say, thereby, that men can do things which are manifestly beyond their power to perform. But with regard to that which men actually can achieve, their works are the more beautiful. Permit me, O Emperor, to illustrate this by an example."

The Emperor granted permission. Rabbi Akiba departed, but soon returned in the company of a servant, who was carrying a sheaf of ears of wheat and a magnificent cake, the "chef-d'oeuvre" of a confectioner.

"O Emperor," said the Rabbi, "these ears of wheat are the work of God. This is the form in which God caused them to grow. But men have made this precious

<sup>1</sup>Midrash Tanchuma, section Tazria.

cake out of that wheat. The cake is the work of man. Am I not right in maintaining that the works of men are more beautiful than those of God ?”

“Why,” asked Tinius Rufus, “do you perform circumcision ? Do you wish to improve upon the handiwork of the omniscient, omnipotent God ?

“I thought,” answered Rabbi Akiba, “that our first question was aiming at this one, and it was for this reason that I declared that the works of men are the more beautiful. When the Lord God had created the universe, He rested, we are told in the Scriptures, from all the work which He had accomplished. Man, too, is the work of God, and the mind, which distinguishes him from all other creatures, is a gift of the all-powerful, all-knowing God. Whatever man, spurred on by his intellectual force, achieves, is also God’s work. God endowed him with the capacity to evoke new forms from the materials which the world offers him. The marble which God called into being is beautiful, but still more beautiful is the sculpture of the inspired artist, who bestows ever new shapes of beauty upon the marble. Out of pigments, which the earth yields, or which are prepared from plants, the painter conjures up, on simple canvas, a picture which captivates all beholders. Out of wood and stone and mortar, the master-mason rears a palace wherein kings and emperors pass their lives in comfortable enjoyment. We cannot clothe ourselves in the flax or wool ; the skilled hand of man must first convert them into garments, which conceal our nakedness, protect us against the inclemencies of the weather, increase human beauty, and lend dignity to rulers. Through the genius of man, the flesh of animals and the fruits of the field become not merely edible but more

savory. Thus the Almighty has granted the capability of developing what He created. To us Jews, the people to whom He revealed Himself, He gave laws and precepts whereby it is made possible for us to purify our souls and to make our bodies serviceable to them, as the Scriptures tell us : 'The word of God is purified; He is a shield to all those who trust in Him.' The first rung of the ladder which extends from earth to Heaven is circumcision. It is the sign of the covenant which God made with our forefathers. On the eighth day after birth, every male child must be introduced into this covenant, in order that he wear the sign unmistakably upon his body, and in order that he be ever aware of the fact that the Jew is called to serve God and to make known His holy name. God's law does not wish to annul the impulses which He placed in the human breast; on the contrary, it wishes to hold them within the bounds which the Almighty deems calculated to promote the welfare and the happiness of men. That is the purpose and the goal of the covenant which God made with our forefathers, and that is the reason that we practice circumcision, in order to perfect even the masterpiece of creation and to develop man's lofty gifts. You ask, Rufus, whether we wish to improve upon the handiwork of God ? Certainly we do; but we do it in the spirit and according to the wish of the omniscient, omnipotent God."

"You have very well explained and defended," said the Emperor, "that custom of yours, which Tinius Rufus had represented as foolish and superstitious. From this day, the ban upon circumcision shall be lifted."

"Thanks, noble Emperor," said Rabbi Akiba. "Will you but add to your acts of grace the additional favor that you permit us to hallow the Sabbath?"

"Why," asked Rufus, "do you celebrate just the seventh day of the week? Can you not solemnize another day just as well?"<sup>1</sup>

"Why," queried Rabbi Akiba in turn, "did the Emperor appoint Tinius Rufus governor of Palestine? Could he not just as well have appointed any other man governor?"

"The Emperor wished to honor me above all other men."

"And the King of Kings, praised be He, wished to honor the seventh day of the week above all other days."

"If God had really wished to honor the seventh day, he would have distinguished it from all other days. But the rain and the dew fall on the Sabbath as on the other days of the week; the wind blows, men are born, and men die on the Sabbath as on the other days of the week."

"When God," replied Rabbi Akiba, "delivered our forefathers from Egyptian slavery and caused them to wander through the desert for forty years in order to mould them into a people of God, He provided them with food and drink in regions where there is neither sowing nor harvesting. He caused the manna to rain down upon them from Heaven six days each week. On the sixth day, God gave them a double portion, thereby distinguishing the seventh day, inasmuch as the Jews did not have to gather manna on the Sabbath."

<sup>1</sup>Midrash Tanchuma, section Ki Thissa.

"What interest to me," said Tinius Rufus, "are your stories of things that are supposed to have happened many centuries ago? How can you convince me of the truth of such stories? Can you show me trustworthy witnesses who saw and experienced them? Be silent to me of events that occurred long ago, and give me proofs which I myself may be able to test."

"In India," replied Rabbi Akiba, "there is a stream named Sambatyon; the waters of this river rush furiously along, driving huge rocks before it, for six days every week; but on the seventh it rests; not a wave ripples, not a stone moves in the river-bed. The Sambatyon was created by God as a testimonial of the fact that the seventh day of the week is a day of rest."

"You are clever," retorted Rufus, "that you draw your evidence from such a remote spot. Do you expect us to go to India to seek out the Sambatyon river? If you cannot adduce a proof for your assertion from nearby facts, we must declare the celebration of the Sabbath a harmful superstition, which restrains people from working and misleads them to idleness."

Then Rabbi Akiba prayed in his heart :

"Almighty God, Thou who hast so often performed miracles for Thy worshippers, show me, too, Thy power, in order that this wicked man be put to shame."

And he said : "Rufus, the grave of your father is here in Antioch. Your father must now receive, in the beyond, the penalty of his evil deeds on earth. During the six days of the week, condemned souls must suffer; but on the Sabbath they are permitted to rest. Give orders to watch your father's grave. Six days smoke ascends from its depths, but, on the seventh, even your

father may rest from the tortures of hell, and no smoke arises from his grave."

The Emperor sent messengers to observe what occurred at the grave, and the words of Rabbi Akiba were borne out. At this, Hadrian also removed the laws against the celebration of the Sabbath, to the great discomfiture of Tinius Rufus.

## XL.

### THE TEMPTRESS.

Rabbi Akiba and Tinius Rufus again appeared before the Emperor, the former as defender, the latter as accuser of the Jews.

"There is no people on earth," began Tinius Rufus, "which is so intolerant as the Jews. Every people honors its gods and smiles at the idolatry of the other nations, deeming it only superstition. But the Jews hate the other gods and teach that their God detests idolatry. The God of the Jews hates the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Parthians, and all the other races of the earth, because they worship other gods than Him."<sup>1</sup>

"How can you defend yourself, Judaeen, against this sweeping accusation?" asked the Emperor.

"Permit me," said Rabbi Akiba, "to relate to you a dream that disturbed me last night. A friend, it seemed to me, gave me a male dog and a female dog; the male dog Rufus, I called, and the female Rufina."

At these words of the Rabbi, Tinius Rufus became red with indignation, while Hadrian laughed immoderately.

"Miserable Jew," cried the governor of Judaea, "you deserve to be whipped to death. Even in your dreams, your malicious, rebellious spirit displays itself. How can you have the audacity to give my name and that of my wife to your dogs!"

<sup>1</sup>Midrash Tanchuma, section Terumah.

"Does that vex you so?" asked Rabbi Akiba. "Is there such a great difference between yourself and your dog? You eat and drink, and the dog eats and drinks; you sleep and the dog sleeps; you die and the dog dies. Yet you wax furious if, in a dream, I called a dog by your name! Has not the Holy One, blessed be He, who has spanned the heavens and placed the earth upon a firm foundation, the immortal, boundless One, cause to be angry when deluded human beings give His name to images of stone and wood?"

This time, too, Rabbi Akiba emerged victorious, for Hadrian nodded approval. The decrees which ordered the Jews to pay divine honors to the likenesses of the Emperor and to introduce the worship of Antinous into their cities and villages were withdrawn. Utterly crushed, Tinius Rufus returned to his home, where his wife, Rufina, was not a little startled by his appearance. She was a Roman lady of aristocratic descent and one of the most beautiful representatives of her sex. Beaming with youth and beauty, she went to meet her husband, but started back in amazement at sight of him.

"Rufus," she exclaimed, "what ails you? Have you fallen into disfavor with the Emperor? Did Hadrian sentence you to death? Your appearance terrifies me. Speak, my husband, tell me the evil that has occurred!"

"This Jew," cried out Rufus, "this Akiba, worries me to distraction. Whatever I say, he refutes successfully, and the Emperor sides with him. I am driven almost to the point of wishing to commit suicide! Not a day passes on which he does not thoroughly humiliate me."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Nedarim 50a; Compare the commentary of Rabbenu Nissim.

"I shall deliver you from him," said Rufina.

"You?" asked her husband in astonishment.

"Hear me, Rufus. They say that I am beautiful, more beautiful than all other members of my sex. The Jews, like other men, are not unsusceptible to feminine beauty, and passion may frequently be aroused in men even in old age. Adorned in my most brilliant ornaments, I shall approach this Rabbi and set his venerable heart aflame; it will burn all the more brightly, because of its great dryness and consequent combustibility. My name is not Rufina, if I do not succeed in making him fall completely and foolishly in love with me, so that he does every thing that I, with a sweet smile or amid hot tears, may demand of him. Thus I shall compel him to do things that will make him ridiculous in the eyes of the Emperor, the Romans, and his own people; then he will be harmless, and you will triumph over him."

"I hardly think you will succeed in such a scheme with this man. He is a sage, a philosopher, and exceedingly virtuous."

"Was there ever a wiser, greater philosopher than Aristotle? Once his pupil, the young Alexander, had formed an intimacy with a beautiful Athenian woman. Aristotle rebuked his pupil bitterly and sought to estrange him from his bewitching companion. Thereupon, Alexander complained to the hetaira. But she consoled her friend and said: 'Just let me alone, I shall see to it that your wise teacher changes his mind.' She visited the Stagirite sage and gazed at him with consuming passion. At first, the great philosopher resisted; but soon she succeeded in kindling his cold heart. He fondled and caressed her, until she expressed the desire to ride on his back. And lo! She was able to fulfill

her desire! The great philosopher let himself down on all fours, and carried the alluring girl through the room as though he were a beast of burden, while, with a little stick, she spurred the foremost sage of all times to greater and greater speed. At this moment, Alexander entered, and, to his utter bewilderment, saw his learned teacher acting the part of a woman's clown. Aristotle was thoroughly ashamed and did not again attempt to separate the pair of lovers."

"In sooth, that is a racy story! Truly, no one on earth is wiser than was Aristotle. Try your luck, then, and make this virtuous Rabbi a laughing-stock for the entire world."

Rabbi Akiba was alone when the governor's beautiful wife, clad in her richest garments, entered his chamber. He gazed at her, sadness darkened his countenance, and tears rushed out of his eyes.

"Are you the great Rabbi of the Jews?" asked Rufina in wonderment. "Tell me, why are you weeping?"

"I am weeping," said Rabbi Akiba, "that so beautiful a creature as you should miss the aim of your life. You left the hand of the Creator a veritable masterpiece. In you, the Almighty showed how much beauty He can mould out of nothing, and this masterpiece lives a life full of vanity and frivolity. The day will soon come when this beauty will disappear; the brilliance of these eyes will be extinguished, the noble form will be wasted away, will become the prey of flames or food for worms. Your undying soul will go down to the lower world, exposed to eternal torments, for you are doing nothing, during your lifetime, to fulfill the purpose of creation, to become a better and wiser woman."

Rufina had listened to the words of the Rabbi in amazement; the gentle, musical voice, resounded with noble melancholy, penetrated into the deepest recesses of her heart. All her frivolous intentions were forgotten; she began to weep aloud.

"Rabbi," she said amid her tears, "is it possible for me to shape my future differently?"

"It is possible," answered Rabbi Akiba, gently and lovingly. "The Almighty is merciful, gracious, and benevolent towards repentant sinners."

"Rabbi, can I, may I, embrace Judaism?"

"You can and may. Become acquainted with the teachings of our God, my daughter, and seek to gain eternal salvation. But then you must renounce the gods and all the vices which the Romans practice; first test yourself, therefore, since it is very difficult to carry out all the commandments of the law of Israel, the observance of the Sabbath, the dietary regulations, the precepts regarding what is clean and what unclean, and all the others."

"Rabbi, I came here to bribe you by my beauty, to fascinate you, and to make you ridiculous in the eyes of the Emperor and the whole nation, in order that my husband, whom you have so often put to shame, might triumph over you. You have disarmed me by your gentle, yet convincing words. I have abandoned my silly scheme, and I shall henceforth meditate deeply upon life and endeavor to ennoble mine by giving it real content. I shall draw upon the teachings of wisdom and drink thirstily at the springs of truth."

"And your husband?"

"I shall seek to persuade Rufus to begin a better life. He, too, sneers at the gods in his heart, and

worships them only for the sake of appearance.”

“It is true that he who has renounced the false can easily be won over to the true. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that Tinius Rufus will forsake the paths of sin and vice on which he has long been accustomed to walk. The blood of many innocent men, women, youths, and maidens reddens his guilty hand. But no sin is so great that it cannot be expiated by sincere remorse and repentance.”

“Well, then, I shall try to win Rufus for the truth, I shall attempt to move his obdurate heart by pleading and supplication, and if he refuses to tread the path of virtue—”

“If he refuses?”

“I shall find means of terminating our marriage union. Farewell, Rabbi, you will hear from me again.”

## XLI.

### A NEW HOPE.

The Emperor returned to Rome and Tinius Rufus to his residence at Caesarea, while Rabbi Akiba went back to Usha. He found the entire country in tumultuous excitement. Everyone was speaking of the one great and happy event; the long and ardently desired Messiah had appeared.

We must retrace our steps over a period of eighteen years in our narrative.

A Jew, named Reuben, met an Arab on the afternoon of the ninth of Ab. The latter said to him:

"Rejoice, Judæan, the Messiah was born during this hour."

"In what city?" asked Reuben.

"In Bethlehem."

"What is his name?"

"Menahem."

"And that of his father?"

"Hezekiah."

Reuben sold his only possession, his cow, bought all kinds of articles of use for small children, and set out for Bethlehem, to see, if possible, the new Messiah.

When he reached the city, he offered for sale, to mothers of small children, articles for the use of infants; and they bought from him. One woman called out to a young mother who was passing by:

"Do you not wish to buy something, too, for your little Menahem?"

"No," replied the woman, "I hate him, because he was born on the day on which the Temple was destroyed."

"Buy, lady," said Reuben, "perhaps, on his account, the Temple will be rebuilt."

"I have no money," said Menahem's mother timidly.

"I shall trust you," answered Reuben, "until I return to Bethlehem."

He gave her the rest of his wares and hung about the neck of the boy a memorial coin tied to a string, a coin of the time of the Hasmonean King; on one side a palm-tree was stamped, on the other a vine.

At the end of a year, Reuben returned to Bethlehem, to obtain news concerning the welfare of the little Menahem. But the mother came tearfully toward him, and said:

"He was carried off by a terrible hurricane a few days after you saw him."

This is how it had happened. Hezekiah, the father of Menahem, a descendant of the old Jewish kings of the house of David, was a needy day-laborer. One day his wife went into the forest to gather twigs; she took the child with her and seated him beneath a tree. While the woman was industriously toiling, the skies became overcast, and it grew very dark. A violent storm arose, driving the heavy black clouds before it and bending the trees until they cracked. The wind came from the west, but a strong current of air also proceeded from the opposite direction, causing the clouds to crash together, lightnings to dart, and thunder to peal forth. In the meantime, the rain was pouring in torrents. Weeping anxiously, the mother of Menahem sought her child, but

was unable to reach it. Finally, the storm subsided; with great difficulty, the trembling mother found the spot where she had placed her child. Would it still be living? Had it been struck by lightning or drowned in the cloudburst? Nothing of all this. The child had disappeared, without leaving behind a trace. Amid tearful wailings, the unhappy woman made a thorough but vain search of the entire forest. Then she hastened home, and Hezekiah, together with all the inhabitants of Bethlehem, set out to look for the missing child. But no clue of the little Menahem's whereabouts was to be found. The storm must have carried him off bodily.

In point of fact, the storm had carried the child off bodily; it had hurled him down from the mountain and cast him into a pool of water. A stranger, by name Levi of Kesib, the city in which our ancestor Judah was sojourning at the time that his wife bore him his son Shela (cf. Genesis XXXVIII. 5), happened to pass along the road. He noticed the child, which was in danger of drowning, seized it and took it along with him, hastily continuing his journey in order to escape the storm.

Levi of Kesib succeeded in bringing the boy, whose life he had saved, to his house, and he reared him as his own child. As he did not know the name of the boy, he called him Simeon. The lad grew up, became tall and strong, and displayed remarkable development. His gift of comprehension was unequalled; he excelled all his schoolmates and was the pride of his teachers. Of marvellous beauty, he also possessed unusual physical strength, so that he was loved and feared by all. Several times, malicious fellow-students had tried to expose him to scorn; for there was a smirch upon his

name; he was a foundling, whose descent was unknown. But Simeon knew how to protect his honor, he would thrash the mockers, even if they were much older than he.

Simeon was often made very unhappy by the fact that he knew nothing of his origin. Who were his parents who had exposed him to destruction in the wind and rain? Was he a child of sin, who would never be permitted to marry a Jewish girl?

His foster-father comforted him.

"Study diligently," he said. "One day, when you will have become learned in the Torah, you will surpass in rank and dignity even the high-priest."

And Simeon studied with fiery zeal. When he had grown to be a young man, his keen mind embraced the entire field of sacred lore. At the same time, ambition caused his heart to swell. With deep bitterness, he perceived the intolerable sufferings which the pressure of Roman domination was inflicting upon Israel.

"Oh," he often sighed, "if I could only liberate my people, if I could only shatter this crushing yoke with which those scoundrels are weighing Judah down. Ha, if I were standing at the head of my nation, with the trumpets calling to battle! Lord of Hosts, I should conquer as did David or die as did Saul. But who am I? A nameless person, a foundling, an outcast! I may not dream of fighting at the head of my people. But must it then be at the head? Even if I could brandish my sword against the foe of my nation only as the least of the warriors, the most insignificant of the champions of God, and dip my blade in the lifeblood of our murderers and oppressors! Lord of Hosts, if the promise to which we hold firm is to be fulfilled, send him soon,

the longed-for redeemer, for Israel is now a slave, contemptible, despised, wretched, as it never before has been. They wish to force us to serve idols, to work on the Sabbath, and to renounce circumcision! How willingly would I inspire my people to battle and glory—but who will give ear to the voice of the outcast, the foundling?”

One day, the young Simeon approached his foster-father in great perplexity.

“What is the trouble, my son?” asked the latter.

“I had a dream,” replied the lad, “may I relate it to you?”

“Tell me all, my son!”

“Then listen. I was lying upon my couch and sleeping. I dreamed that I was standing upon a lofty mountain and gazing at the stars. Suddenly I heard the flourish of a trumpet. The sound still rings through my soul; never did I hear such solemn, sublime tones. A sea of flames spread out over the heavens, the stars disappeared, and I saw a powerful army advancing from the fiery sea. The human eye has never beheld such warlike splendor. Chariots and riders, gleaming processions of armed warriors, hosts of flashing spears, countless banners adorned with the emblems of the tribes of Israel, Levites with golden harps, celebrating in song Israel’s victorious future. ‘Bliss,’ they sang, ‘is Israel’s share; for he comes, he comes in his might, the fervently-awaited Messiah.’ And lo! there appeared a powerful chariot, drawn by strange-appearing bulls, who seemed to be swimming upon glowing flames; in this magnificent chariot stood a warrior, proud and motionless, and when I looked into his countenance, I recognized my own features. I was frightened at my dream and awoke. The vision had passed; nothing was to be seen but the light

of the moon, and I heaved a sigh and said: 'Alas, that such dreams visit me, the mean, insignificant foundling!' "

And Levi answered: "Do not grieve, my son, perhaps the mystery of your descent will yet be cleared up. When I found you, you had about your neck a string to which was tied a memorial coin of the era of the Hasmonean kings. I shall show it to you."

He went to a chest and drew out a coin. At the same time, the door opened, and a stranger entered. Levi hastened to greet him, and joyously exclaimed:

"Reuben, my friend, at last after many years, your road leads you to Kesib!"

But Reuben did not grasp the hand that was extended to him. Fixedly he gazed at the memorial coin, which Levi had transferred to his left hand.

"Levi," cried he, "who gave you the coin tied to that piece of string?"

"I took it from the neck of a child that I rescued from drowning during a violent rain-storm."

"Where did you find the child, Levi? I beg of you, tell me, where did you find the child?"

"In the neighborhood of Bethlehem."

"What happened to the child?"

"He has developed into a handsome youth, pious, noble-hearted, strong in body and mind. Here he is."

Reuben observed the young Simeon, and amazement took possession of him.

"Truly," he exulted, "the youthful Solomon on his throne could not have been handsomer than is this lad. Praised and glorified be the name of the Almighty from eternity unto eternity! Menahem, I proclaim you to be

the anointed of the Eternal, the helper and deliverer of my people!"

Simeon had become pale.

"Menahem?" he stammered. "My name is Simeon."

"Not at all," cried Reuben. "Your name is Menahem, the consoler; your father was named Hezekiah and is a descendant of David. I myself tied this memorial coin on this string about your neck some seventeen years ago. The side that is turned to me bears a palm-tree; on the other side, there must be a vine. Soon afterwards, you were lost in a forest by your mother, during an overwhelming storm."

Reuben then related all that he knew concerning the birth and the origin of the boy, and the prophecy with which his name had been connected. Levi and his foster-son listened astounded. Then all three journeyed to Bethlehem. Hezekiah was dead, as was his wife, but the inhabitants of Bethlehem recalled all the circumstances precisely, and soon the report circulated that the Messiah had appeared. Already many had come to do homage to the Redeemer; but most of the people exclaimed:

"Up, let us go to Usha and hear what Rabbi Akiba will have to say. Let his word decide whether the hour of redemption has arrived, or whether this man from Kesib, this Bar-Kesiba, is a 'son of falsehood!'"<sup>1</sup>

The new Messiah, accompanied by his foster-father, by Reuben, and by a throng of people, proceeded to Usha. When they arrived there, Rabbi Akiba had not yet returned from Antioch. From all sections of the country, people flocked to see the Messiah and pass

<sup>1</sup>'Son of falsehood' is the literal translation of 'Bar-Kesiba,' thus making a word-play.

judgment for themselves. The city of Usha could not accommodate the extraordinary number of strangers, most of whom had to sleep in the open fields; the excitement grew from day to day.

One of the new-comers was Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai. The wife of Hezekiah of Bethlehem had been his sister.

"Undoubtedly," he said, when he saw Bar-Kesiba, "you are the lost Menahem, the son of my sister. You resemble my deceased brother-in-law, Hezekiah, as only a son can resemble his father."

At last Rabbi Akiba returned. The sages assembled about him; it was a most critical moment. If the sages denied the self-styled Messiah their recognition, a sanguinary civil war might ensue; for thousands had already banded themselves about Bar-Kesiba, ready to proclaim him their king, to do battle for him, aye, even to die for him.

Not less weighty was the responsibility which the sages would be shouldering in the event they would welcome the youth as the long-expected Messiah. For then a decisive struggle with powerful world-dominating Rome was inevitable.

The first thing to do was to get at the true circumstances of the whole affair. Reuben appeared before the assembly and recounted the strange events in which he had been a participant. Levi then stepped forward, and reported on his finding of the child and on the latter's growth to young manhood; he told of the boy's brilliant mental qualities, his unwearying industry, his super-human physical strength, his ambitious plans and dreams. Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai confirmed the account of the lad's origin and of his close kinship with himself.

Rabbi Akiba was powerfully stirred by all these reports, and almost all the sages of Israel believed the fulfillment of their most beautiful hopes, their most ardent longings, to be near at hand; but not all. Rabbi Jose ben Kisma raised his voice in warning.

"How can we," he said, "rise in revolt against the vast, mighty Empire! God permitted the Romans to destroy His holy dwelling-place, and should we break out into rebellion?"

Rabbi Jose ben Kisma was one of the most honored teachers of Israel, and enjoyed high distinction among the Romans. He had been offered an important government post by them, but he had rejected it in order to be able to live exclusively for the study of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, his opinion bore great weight and decided that of many others. Rabbi Jochanan ben Torta was one of those who sided with him.

"The time has not yet come," said he, "when we may expect the redeemer. Our epoch is not ripe for such an occurrence. Grass will have sprung up from your grave, Akiba, and the son of David will not yet have come."

At this instant, the door opened and Bar-Kesiba entered. His appearance produced an overpowering impression. His tall stature, his noble mien, his fiery eyes, his royal bearing—all this swiftly gained for him the hearts of those present.

"He is the Messianic King!" cried Rabbi Akiba enthusiastically.

He arose and approached the youth, saying:

<sup>1</sup> Compare the Beraitha which is printed in our prayer-books as the sixth chapter of the "Ethics of the Fathers," section 9.

"A star has come forward from Jacob, a sceptre has arisen in Israel. Edom will become the spoil of war, but Israel will accomplish deeds of valor."

The youth rushed upon Rabbi Akiba, embraced him warmly, and kissed him, while all who were assembled lifted up their voices and exclaimed: "A star has come forward from Jacob."

The cry was passed on, so that those who were standing outside called out loudly:

"A star has come forward from Jacob."

From that moment, the new Messiah was given the name of "Bar Kochba" (the son of the star), derived from Rabbi Akiba's application of the scriptural verse: "A star has come forward from Jacob."

After the Messiah had been acknowledged by Rabbi Akiba and colleagues, Jewish soldiers streamed from all countries. But Bar Kochba did not take every one into his army. Only those who had given proof of courage, steadfastness, and the readiness to make sacrifices were permitted to enter the hosts of the Messiah as warriors of the Lord.

When the news of the uprising reached Caesarea, Tinius Rufus, who had been so stern and so grim towards his subjects when they were submissive, immediately fled. He had already divorced his wife Rufina.

One day, an aristocratic Roman lady came, with a large following, to the camp where Rabbi Akiba was tarrying at the side of Bar Kochba.

"Lead me," she said to the sentries, "to the great sage of Israel."

She was obeyed. When she had entered the tent of Rabbi Akiba, she threw herself at his feet and embraced his knees.

"Do not cast me off," she cried, "o wise and noble-minded man. Let me serve as your hand-maiden, whom you will permit to wash your feet."

"Arise, Rufina," said Rabbi Akiba. "You are the wife of another."

"I am no longer the wife of Rufus. When I informed him of my determination to embrace Judaism, he became indignant and divorced me. As soon as I was free, I hastened to carry out my decision. Rabbi Judah ben Baba received me into the Jewish faith, and now I have come to you, O revered sage. Do not reject me, but allow me to remain near you."

And she remained near him. Rabbi Akiba made her his wife; the rich treasures which she had brought with her were expended in the service of the country.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, Bar Kochba was making astonishing progress; nothing could resist the victorious army of the Jews. The Romans were driven from all the fortresses of Judaea; Galilee, too, had to be evacuated and fell into the hands of the Jews.

Bar Kochba had selected the large city of Bethar as his residence. Even before the fall of Jerusalem, it had been an important city. After the destruction of the national centre of the Jewish people, it grew remarkably.

When Emperor Hadrian received the first report of the rebellion in Judaea, he thought that he would be able to put it down with a scant show of force. But when the Romans suffered one defeat after another, he sent Paulus Martius, one of his ablest generals, with a large army to Judaea, in order to suppress the uprising.

<sup>1</sup> Nedarim 50a.

Bar Kochba held a review of the Jewish troops before the walls of Bethar. His army consisted of two hundred thousand heavy-armed infantry, thirty thousand archers and light-armed troops, and twenty thousand cavalry. Barak, a man of towering stature, bore the holy standard, upon which were inscribed in Hebrew letters, worked in gold thread, the words: "A star has come forward from Jacob."

Bar Kochba sat upon a throne, beside him Rabbi Akiba. The entire army passed in solemn array, and all lowered their banners and lances as they reached the spot where their courageous leader was seated.

The foe stood drawn up in battle-array on the plain of Sharon. The Jewish hosts advanced to meet them, and pitched camp at the other end of the plain. One could clearly distinguish the fires of the opposing forces, and, now and then, strains of martial music beat ominously upon the ears of the combatants on both sides. Scarcely a quarter of a mile separated the serried masses of men. The fate of centuries depended upon the outcome of the struggle on the morrow.

At about the second watch of the night, Bar Kochba arose from his cot. He stood at the entrance of his tent, and gazed rapturously upon the mighty army that was prepared to fight and to conquer for him.

"What a majestic phenomenon!" he exclaimed. "I, I was the one who assembled this powerful force! The white tents fill the purple landscape as far as the eye can reach over the broad plain. All these hosts are ready to do battle for me."

Day broke, and Bar Kochba gave the signal to commence hostilities. With the centre of his army, he attacked irresistibly the centre of the Roman army, and

threw it into disorder. The Romans were pushed back, and Bar Kochba slew the Roman General in single combat.

While Bar Kochba was deceiving himself into thinking that the battle had already been won, an entirely different fate had overtaken the left flank of his army. Sulpicius, one of Paulus Martius' captains, who occupied a very advantageous position, not only repulsed the onset of the Jews, but threw their left wing into complete disorder and routed it. Sulpicius' eagerness to annihilate his opponents prevented his observing the sad plight of the Roman centre. If, after having defeated the left wing, he had attacked Bar Kochba from the rear, the Jews would certainly have been lost. But now Bar Kochba's eagle eye discovered the negligence of Sulpicius and made good use of his over-hastiness. He desisted in his pursuit of the Roman centre, and hurried to the assistance of the left wing of his army. With his own hand, he laid Sulpicius low, and put his legions to flight.

Thirty thousand Roman corpses covered the battlefield; the remainder of the Romans fled ignominiously. Many of them were cut down or taken prisoners by the hotly pursuing Jews. The victory was complete; Bar Kochba's army had suffered only minor losses.

Rabbi Akiba embraced Bar Kochba on the field of battle.

"Praised be the God of Israel," he said; "He brought to pass to-day what He promised through His prophet Haggai: 'A little more, and I shall shatter heaven and earth, overthrow the power of empires, and blot out the might of the heathens.'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin 97b.

When Emperor Hadrian learned of the defeat of his army and the death of his general, his heart was filled with fear. The uprising of the Jews had gained such an impetus and such magnitude as to threaten the downfall of the entire Roman empire. All the oppressed and subjugated peoples were virtually panting with the desire to regain their independence. If the Jews succeeded in liberating themselves, the dominion of the Romans over all the provinces was lost forever. The Germans, the Gauls, the Britons, the Spaniards, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Greeks, the Africans,—all would rise in revolt. The Emperor, therefore, resolved to summon his most distinguished general, Julius Severus, from his campaign in far-off Britain, where he was engaged in the task of subduing the liberty-loving Britons. All this, however, required much time, which Bar Kochba employed in establishing his government upon a firm footing and in materially strengthening the fortresses which had been wrested from the Romans. The principal fortified cities were Kabul, Sichin, and Magdala. On King's Mountain lay the populous city of Tur Simon; here three hundred large baskets of bread were distributed to the poor every Friday. This city, too, was strongly protected; and Bar Kochba had appointed one of his generals, Bar Dorma by name, commander of the garrison.

The confidence of the Jews in Bar Kochba as the Divinely-sent Messiah had risen to the very highest pitch, as the result of his successes. No one believed that the independence of Judaea could be endangered. Meanwhile, Julius Severus was approaching the borders of Palestine with a powerful Roman army.

## XLII.

### “LONG LIVE THE KING!”

Bar Kochba had captured more than nine hundred unwall'd cities and fifty fortresses; but the holy city of Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Romans. We have already related the fact that Tinius Rufus, at the command of the Emperor Hadrian, had had the Temple mountain ploughed up; a temple for the worship of idols had been erected on the site of the holy Temple; even the name of the city was, according to Hadrian's intention, to disappear from the memory of man; Jerusalem was to exist no longer; for, the Romans had given the ancient city the name of Aelia Capitolina.

Bar Kochba had put off for the last the siege of the holy city; he now advanced to the attack with a large army. But without previously throwing up defenses for his men, after the usual manner of besiegers, he gave the signal for an immediate onslaught. He stormed the walls with a thousand men, leaped into the city, cut down all who resisted, and opened the city-gate. Then the entire army of Israel entered. The Roman garrison was partly slain, partly taken captive, and the Jews were again in possession of the residence of the great king. Songs of joy and praise once more resounded through the hitherto desolate streets of Jerusalem. Jews flocked from all corners of the earth to rebuild the city of God, to surround it with strong, new walls, and, primarily, to reconstruct the holy dwelling-place of the Eternal, Lord of Hosts, whose throne rests above the ark, between

the Cherubim. Laudatory hymns were sung throughout the entire city; on its squares and in its streets joy reigned unconfined. All hands were busily occupied in bringing up blocks of marble, hewn stones, cedar wood and shittimwood, lime and mortar, iron and copper, silver and gold, and all that was essential for the erection of the palace of the King of kings. Men and women, grey-beards and youths, boys and girls, vied with one another in procuring all that was necessary. The priests convened to discuss the choice of a high priest and to obtain mutual instruction on the details of the sacrificial service. The Levites practiced the singing of the psalms and the playing of the instruments, the trumpets, harps, and flutes, which were required by the Temple ritual. The sages considered the re-installation of the great Sanhedrin in the hewn-stone hall of the Temple that was about to be built and the organization of small Sanhedrins in all the cities of the Holy Land. All were in accord on the point that Rabbi Akiba should preside as prince of the sages of Israel, as had Simon the Just, Joshua ben Perachiah, and Hillel the Elder before him.

At last the hour had come in which Bar Kochba was to lay the corner-stone of the Temple. The temple for the worship of idols had been torn down, the images had been ground to dust, and all the preliminary steps had been taken. A tremendous throng covered the Temple mountain and the adjacent-squares and streets; sounds of joy and gladness filled the air. Rabbi Akiba ascended a tribune to address the assembly, and suddenly, deep stillness fell upon the countless host.

"My brothers," said Rabbi Akiba in a distinctly audible voice, "a day of unclouded happiness has risen for the house of Israel. This Mount Moriah is the holi-

est spot of the entire earth. God moulded from its dust the first pair of human beings; here Adam brought up his first oblation, the steer which had but one horn on its forehead; Cain and Abel also offered their gifts to the Eternal on this sacred spot, and a fire descended from Heaven to consume the offering of Abel. Here our father Abraham set up the altar upon which, in obedience to the word of the Almighty, he prepared to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Here, too, God revealed Himself to the patriarch, Jacob, who beheld a ladder, the foot of which rested upon the earth and the top of which reached into heavens, the whole illuminated by the majesty of God. But the glory of this place remained hidden from the nations and even from Israel, until David purchased the threshing-floor of Araunah, and consecrated it for its sacred purpose. After David's death, the wisest of all men built the house of our God. At that time, Tyre was the most artistic city in the world; Solomon, therefore, made a treaty with Hiram, King of Tyre, and the masons of Hiram, in conjunction with those of Solomon, brought together the large and costly stones which were to serve as the foundation of the Temple. For seven years, the most skilled masons of all the world, aided by seventy thousand bearers of burdens and eighty thousand hewers of wood, labored incessantly. The wisest of all kings was also the richest; the priceless treasures of the world were collected from the remotest lands for the construction of the sanctuary of our God. He Himself blessed the work of building, so that it made wonderful progress, and a structure was produced which had not its equal anywhere on the globe. But, on account of the sins of our ancestors, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, attacked our peo-

ple and set fire to the Temple, so that Judah was forced to go into exile. After seventy years, God took pity upon our fathers, and ordered Cyrus, the king of Persia, who, in the meanwhile, had overthrown the Babylonian Empire, to permit the Jews to return to their native land and to re-build the house of the Lord. My brothers, this house, too, was beautiful and majestic; I saw it with my own eyes when I was still a lad, and its form has remained ineradicably in my memory. You all know that the house of God was destroyed a second time, on this occasion by the Roman Emperors, Vespasian and Titus. Now God has again had mercy on us, and has sent us His Messiah, in order that we should build His house for the third time, but more glorious now than it has ever been. Peace and truth will dwell therein, it will be called by the name of the Lord, God of Hosts; nations will stream to it and breathe their prayers to the God of Israel, the one God, the God of truth. If we are victorious in the battles which remain to be fought, the law will go forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem. An era of peace, of blessing, and of prosperity will dawn for all the nations of the earth, who will convert the weapons of war into tools of peaceful pursuits and will cease their endeavors to slay and to exterminate one another; crime and vice will vanish from the earth and the nations will recognize the fact that one God created all men, that all men are, therefore, brothers and should live in fraternal harmony. Never, for a single moment, have I abandoned my hopes for this ideal future. Once I came hither with my teachers, Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Elasar ben Azariah, in order to pray on this holy spot for oppressed and threatened Israel. We saw a fox

running over the place where the Holy of Holies had once stood. My teachers wept, but I smiled. They were weeping because of the devastation; but I smiled and rejoiced in my faith in the promise of the Almighty, in the expectation of the happy moment that has now arrived. 'Since God,' I said to my teachers, 'has permitted all the evil with which He threatened us to come to pass, He will surely also bring about all the good which He promised us through His prophets; He will send us succor, will prepare for us unending peace, will re-build His sanctuary, and will again allow His people to pasture upon the fields of justice and peace.' My brothers, the hour of consolation and good fortune has arrived—God has sent us the redeemer for whom we have so long and patiently waited. A star has gone forth from Jacob which has raised aloft the banner of Israel and rescued us from the claws of Edom, from the power of tyrannical, world-dominating Rome. Her armies are scattered, her generals in flight, and Emperor Hadrian is trembling in his Roman stronghold. Edom will fall even lower; all the nations will rise to shake off the Roman yoke from their shoulders, until powerful Rome will be brought low, while Israel performs deeds of heroism. And now the anointed of the Lord will advance to lay the corner-stone of the Temple. Let us, then, sing to the Eternal, let us praise His strength, let us thank Him for having given ear to our supplications and permitted us to live to see this day. Let us rejoice and exult, so that the forecast of the prophet Zachariah may be fulfilled: 'He will lay the corner-stone amid loud cries of approval from the throng!'"

Thus spake Rabbi Akiba, and all those who were assembled raised a shout of joy that caused the earth

to vibrate, and the mountain to tremble in its fastnesses. Amid the sounds of instrumental music and the song of the Levites, the masons brought the corner-stone, which Bar-Kochba was to set in place. It was a huge stone, weighing many hundred pounds; Bar Kochba grasped it with both hands and raised it high above his head. Astonishment was depicted upon the faces of the multitude, and one man said to another: "Verily, he is the anointed of the Lord, the king Messiah; no other could perform such a feat."

Bar Kochba then laid the stone on the spot designated for it. Rabbi Akiba took a golden crown richly set with diamonds, placed it upon the head of the hero, and exclaimed:

"Long live our master, the king."

And all the people joined in the acclamation:

"Long live our master, the king; may the King Messiah live forever!"

## XLIII.

### THE CUTHITES.

While all were busily engaged in the work of erecting the sanctuary, an embassy of the Cuthites, or Samaritans, appeared before Bar Kochba, to make a treaty of alliance with the Jews and to ask permission to assist in the construction of the house of God.

The Cuthites, or Samaritans, were a heathen people who had accepted Judaism. When Shalmanessar, the King of Assyria, had destroyed the kingdom of Israel and carried the ten tribes into captivity to Chalach and Chabor, to the river of Goshen and the cities of Media, he brought tribes from Babylon, Cutha, Ava, Chamath, and Sepharvayim, and settled them in the territory of the quondam kingdom of Israel, in the capital, Samaria, and in the other cities of the realm. These people were named Samaritans after the capital of the country, or Cuthites, after the land of their origin. When these heathens had become at home in the land of Israel, they did not fear the Eternal who, therefore, sent against them a horde of lions, which killed some of them. The report was then sent to the king of Assyria: "The tribes which you have driven out and settled in the cities of Samaria do not know the ways of the God of the land, so that He sends lions against them by which they are killed."

Thereupon, the king of Assyria commanded and said: "Lead thither some of the priests who were carried away from there, so that they may dwell there

and teach the ways of the God of the land." One of the priests who had been deported from Samaria returned and settled in Bethel, where he taught the inhabitants how to worship the Eternal. Henceforth, these heathen tribes, while retaining their pagan deities, worshipped, at the same time, the Lord God of Israel.

The kingdom of Judah outlived that of Israel one hundred and thirty years. Then came Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, who conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and led the Jews in captivity to Babylon. At the end of seventy years, God had pity on His people, and the Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and of the high-priest Joshua ben Jehozadak, returned to Judaea, to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

In the second month of the second year after their return, they laid the corner-stone of the second Temple, amid the blowing of trumpets and horns and the noisy rejoicing of the people. When the Cuthites learned that the Jews had returned and begun to rebuild the Temple, they sent ambassadors to Zerubbabel and the princes of Israel, who said: "We wish to build with you; for we have been seeking your God and sacrificing to Him since the time that the king of Assyria brought us hither." Zerubbabel and Joshua and the other princes of the people answered them: "It is not for you and us to build together a house for our God; we wish to do this work alone, for the Lord God of Israel."

From that time on, the Cuthites became the bitterest enemies of the Jews: they harmed whenever they could; they sought to mislead them, and they addressed accusations against them to the king of Persia; they attacked them with the sword, disturbed the work of

erecting the sanctuary, and burned down the recently built cities and villages, until Ezra and Nehemiah led a new colony from Babylonia. These succeeded in completing the construction of the sanctuary, re-establishing the Jewish state, and keeping the Cuthites within bounds.

But the hostility of the Cuthites for the Jews did not end with this. They spied out every opportunity to do them damage, and, when Alexander the Great overthrew the Persian Empire and conquered a large portion of Asia, the Cuthites almost succeeded in directing the wrath of the conqueror upon the Jews and thus exposing them to the danger of extermination. But Simon the Just, who was high-priest at that time, was able to conciliate the great monarch and to avert the catastrophe from his people.

Alexander had besieged Tyre and summoned the Jews to come to his support. They, however, faithful subjects, as they were, of the last Persian king, Darius Codomanus, who was still living, refused to offer assistance to the foe of their ruler. When the siege was at an end and the dying Darius, in the meantime, had appointed the King of Macedonia his heir, the Cuthites fanned Alexander's hatred of the Jews, and urged him to march upon Judaea, conquer Jerusalem, destroy the Temple, and blot the Jews from the face of the earth. When Simon the Just, the high-priest and prince of the Jews, learned of this, he clad himself in the white garments of the priesthood, bestrode a white courser and commanded the other priests to do likewise. Thus arrayed, they approached the tent of the world conqueror. When Alexander beheld the tall, stately form of the devout high-priest, he threw himself humbly at his feet, whereupon his generals said to him: "O proud van-

quisher of the entire world, exalted son of the gods, do you humble yourself before this Jew?" But Alexander replied: "On the eve of all the great battles that I have fought, the form of this venerable old man has appeared to me in a dream, and I knew that I would be victorious." The king treated Simon and his companions very graciously, and gave them authority to punish the libelous Cuthites. Later, Alexander visited Jerusalem and the Temple, and did not demand of the Jews that they, like other subject peoples, should pay him divine homage and set up his image in the sanctuary. The Jews showed themselves very grateful and all the priests gave the name of Alexander to the sons who were born to them that year, in honor of their new and gracious king. This explains the fact that, even to-day, the Greek name, Alexander, is placed on a par with Hebrew names, and that a Jew who bears this name is so designated when he is called to the reading of the Torah.

It needs scarcely be said that these events did not contribute towards improving the relations between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Cuthites remained the most persistent enemies of the Jews, and were so at the time of the destruction of the second Temple. They had sided with the foes of Israel, when the Jews had revolted under Emperor Trajan and were threatened with extermination by Quietus.

But now they felt moved, by the signal successes of Bar Kochba, to terminate the long-standing hostility and to participate in the war against the Romans. The head of their embassy was one of their foremost chiefs, Manasseh by name.

Bar Kochba convened the council, to consider the proposals of the Cuthites.

"Friends," he addressed the assembly, "I have an exceedingly important announcement to bring before you. If God causes a man's undertakings to prosper, enemies of this man become his friends. The Cuthites are willing to abandon their hostility towards the Jews, which has lasted now for almost five hundred years, wish to form an alliance with us and to help us combat and overcome the Romans, and, finally, are anxious to build the house of God in community with us. I think that we should accept the hand of fraternity that is extended to us. This resolution of the Cuthites is a doubly encouraging sign; it will increase our strength and diminish the number of our opponents."

"King of Israel," said Rabbi Akiba, in his turn, "your words astound me, and I suppose you have uttered them only to test us, your servants, to see whether we are wholly convinced of your divine mission, whether we trust you implicitly. What human aid do we need, if God is with us? Is the arm of the Almighty too short to be of assistance? If we had wished the friendship of the Cuthites, we could have obtained it half a millennium ago. At that time, they said to those who returned from the Babylonian exile: 'We wish to be like you and to build the house of God with you.' Zerubbabel and Joshua rejected this offer of alliance, and wisely so. Our people must remain untainted, must keep its blood free of all foreign elements."

"But the Cuthites," objected Bar Kochba, "have changed since then; they no longer worship and bring sacrifices to strange gods; indeed, they observe some of the commandments of the Torah more strictly even than do the Jews."

"They are idolaters to-day, as their forefathers were," exclaimed Rabbi Akiba. "They offer up sacrifices on Mount Gerizim, although it is forbidden to do so at any other place than the mountain of God in Jerusalem. It is said that they worship an idol in the form of a dove. They do not accept the oral tradition, which God revealed to Moses at Sinai; they would seduce and destroy our people, if we should be willing to make a treaty with them. Why do you, o King of Israel, set any store by human assistance, when the Almighty, the Lord of Hosts, is with us and crushing our enemies before us? We do not need the Cuthites, neither them nor their aid. Therefore, my advice is that you refuse them, as Zerubbabel and Joshua did before us."

"Shall we arbitrarily increase the number of our enemies?" cried out Bar Kochba. "I have already been informed that Julius Severus, the ablest of all the Roman generals, is advancing upon Palestine with a powerful army, which we will have to summon all our energies to resist. Shall we by force make the Samaritans our enemies? They live in the land as do we, they know all the mountains and valleys, all the ravines and passes, and are in a position to lead the Romans, by secret roads, into the very heart of our fortresses."

"Simeon Bar Kochba," said Rabbi Akiba in distress, "are you turning your mind to military science and diplomacy? Do you not trust in the assistance of the Almighty? Do you think that your strong arm and your numerous host will really help you? Did not Gideon overthrow the hundreds of thousands of Midianites with only three hundred men? God alone can aid us, in His might alone do I trust."

"Your words, Rabbi Akiba," said Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai, "are based upon the very foundations of truth. How can we defend ourselves against our undefeated enemy, if we rely only upon our own strength! The Roman Empire is stupendous. Its armies are as numerous as the sands of the sea, and its knowledge of military science is unsurpassed. No nation on earth has been able to resist it, and the territories of the vast Empire extend from one end of the world to the other. How could puny Judaea hope to vanquish so invincible a foe! But before the Almighty, all nations are like a drop of water that clings to the side of a bucket or like a grain of dust on a pair of scales. It is He who measures the oceans in the hollow of His hand, spans the heavens, grasps the dust of the earth with two fingers, weighs mountains and hills in the balance. Against Him all nations are as naught, they are deemed nothingness and void before Him. Only through His omnipotent hand have we been able to conquer thus far and shall we conquer in the future. Let the Cuthites join our enemies; we do not need their assistance."

Bar Kochba arose.

"I adjourn this session of the council," he said. "Let us put off the final decision until tomorrow."

## XLIV.

### DISILLUSIONMENT.

Before the sleeping-chamber of Bar Kochba stood Barak, one of the body-guards of the king, with drawn sword. In the middle of the night, Rabbi Akiba approached him and said:

"I must speak with the king!"

"It is impossible," replied Barak, "the king does not wish to be disturbed."

"Do you know who I am?" asked Rabbi Akiba.

"The man whom all Jews honor as their father and teacher," answered Barak.

"Then let me enter the chamber of the king."

"I cannot grant you this permission."

Just then, the door opened, and Bar Kochba appeared.

"Rabbi," he exclaimed, "it must be something of importance that brings you to me at so late an hour. Enter."

Bar Kochba was in full armor. He sank down upon a divan, and invited Rabbi Akiba, by a gesture of the hand, to do the same.

"Is Israel in danger?" he asked.

"It is in danger," replied Rabbi Akiba. "It is not threatened as long as He watches who never forgets His faithful children. O descendant of David, whom God selected to lead His people, my heart is heavy with anxiety, lest you thoughtlessly forfeit God's aid by turn-

ing your mind from the God of your father and lusting after alien vices."

Bar Kochba arose, and Rabbi Akiba followed his example.

"Be careful," said the Rabbi, "not to turn aside from the path of God either to the right or to the left. God has elevated you; but only if you are a man after His heart, as David was, will you be able to achieve the task of redemption."

Rabbi Akiba had raised his arm threateningly. The light of the full moon fell through the casement of the royal-bed chamber upon his tall form. Bar Kochba stood opposite him, and observed him with keen eyes.

"What do you wish, Rabbi," he said, at last, "do I not do all in my power for my people? You see me in full armor. I grant my eyes no sleep."

"The Protector of Israel sleeps not, neither does He slumber. If God does not build the house, those who are engaged in erecting it labor in vain; if God does not watch over the city, the sentinel stands at his post to no purpose. God guards His favorites and gives them during their sleep, what others vainly strive to obtain in their waking hours."

"What do you demand, Rabbi?"

"I demand that our people shall be a people of God, building and depending only upon His support and awaiting everything from His omnipotent hand."

"Shall we, then, idly lay our hands in our laps?"

"By no means. We must do our duty, but only that which is right and pleasing in the sight of God. Israel is a nation that must dwell alone, and not fraternize with other peoples. Do not misunderstand me; I do not mean to say that Israel must be hostile towards

other nations. Far be that from the servants of the God of truth; for God has commanded: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' not merely thy brother, thy compeer, thy co-religionist, but thy neighbor. This is the basic principle of our Divine teachings. But we Jews are the chosen people of the Lord, selected as His peculiar treasure, called especially for His service. We must endeavor to keep pure and unsullied the written and oral laws, all the commands and precepts of our God. This we can do only by preserving ourselves free from infusion of alien blood. Consequently we cannot make a treaty with the Cuthites. Just because they are more closely related to us than other peoples in their mode of thinking and their faith, we must seclude ourselves the more rigidly from them."

"My friend and teacher, I know that I owe you much, and that the recognition of the people was bestowed upon me as the result of your acknowledgment of my claims. I am truly sorry that our views with regard to the Cuthites are not in accord. I must accept them as allies; I cannot and may not convert them into enemies. The Roman Empire is a colossus, which, once shaken, must collapse. I have caused it to tremble at its very foundations. Soon the subjugated nations in the east as well as in the west, to the north and to the south, will rise and cast off the Roman yoke. Every people that thirsts for liberty is my natural ally, and should I, then, drive the Cuthites into the arms of the Romans, make of them irreconcilable foes?"

"You forget that you must view matters from a different angle from that of the other kings of the earth. You are the scion of the Davidic line; you are the divinely-appointed Messiah. God will lead our armies to

battle and slay our enemies with the mere breath of His nostrils. He will send us the innumerable hosts of his angels to paralyze the arms of our adversaries and to make their catapults harmless."

Bar Kochba smiled.

"I do not rely upon miracles," he said, "but solely upon the size and strength of my army. If God only does not help our enemies, I feel strong enough to combat and vanquish the Romans even without His assistance."<sup>1</sup>

When Rabbi Akiba heard these blasphemous words, he rent his outer garment, lifted up his voice, and wept.

"Bar Kochba," he said, "you are not the messenger of God, not the awaited Messiah, for he will be a devout servant of the Almighty. With these sacrilegious words, you have torn the veil that was bedimming my eyes; now I see clearly that I was laboring under a delusion when I welcomed you as the redeemer sent by God."

Bar Kochba drew his sword from his sheath, sprang at Rabbi Akiba and shouted:

"You are a rebel, Akiba, you must die."

"Then kill me. Death is dearer to me than life, after the bitter disillusionment which I have just experienced."

Bar Kochba lowered his sword.

"No," he said, "I shall not kill you. Your death would provoke all your colleagues, and with them the entire nation, against me. Go among the people and exclaim: 'Bar Kochba is not the Messiah!' Desert him and deliver him to the Romans, to whom you must submit. Then the faithless Romans will come, and slaughter

<sup>1</sup> Jerushalmi, towards the end of Taanith.

the defenceless, sparing neither greybeard nor lad, slaying even the child in its mother's womb."

"Alas, alas," cried Rabbi Akiba, "I see no way out of the difficulty. After the disgraceful words which you have uttered, no community of purpose is possible between us. But I shall not oppose you, nor shall I arouse the people to forsake you. God, who performed the signs which misled me, who endowed you with superhuman strength, He will direct the course of events in accordance with His desire. All who have thus been deceived in you will have to suffer the sad consequences of their error. I, too, shall have to suffer. But far be it from me once again to meddle with the turn of affairs and to declare that I have ceased to agree with you. I shall leave you and spend the rest of my days far from the scene of your activities. God be gracious to you and my people!"

"Rabbi, do not abandon me! Forget the thoughtless words I spoke. I am still so young; let your old age be the guide of my youth!"

"It is well," said Rabbi Akiba; "I shall forget what you have said, although it is scarcely credible that the mouth of the divinely-appointed Messiah could have opened to utter such slanderous words. May God pardon you; I gladly forgive you."

Bar Kochba seized the hand of the Rabbi and said:

"Many thanks, Rabbi; I shall not succumb, so long as your wisdom is my counsellor."

"It can be of use to you only if you follow its advice. Therefore, address the Cuthean emissaries as Zerubbabel and Joshua addressed their forefathers, and dismiss them."

“Never. Reason and consideration demand that I make the Samaritans my friends.”

“Not reason and consideration, but only that which is of advantage to our Torah and our chosen people, may be the criterion for action. Not earthly dominion, not transitory power must be our goal, but the mastery which comes with the light of truth. An independent Judaea in alliance with the Cuthites is a greater danger than the yoke of the Romans. Recognition of the principles of the Cuthites would be tantamount to putting the axe to the tree of Judaism. God planted the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden. Twelve huge boughs grew from its powerful trunk, designed to shelter all humanity in their shade. This tree is Jacob, and the twelve boughs are the tribes of Israel. The birds of the air came and consumed the blossoms and the fruits, destructive insects came and devoured the leaves, a whole band of apes came and broke the twigs, and a savage man chopped down the trunk with an axe; however, the roots soon put forth another tree, still more beautiful and fruitful. But, woe to us, if a worm should gnaw at the roots; for then the tree would necessarily die. All the peoples of the earth have inflicted pain upon Israel, have consumed its blossoms and its fruit, stripped the tree of life of its foliage, broken its twigs. Nebuchadnezzar and Titus each hewed down the trunk; but ever and anon, the roots put forth new life. The roots must remain sound. No external danger can annihilate Israel; but the purity of our belief must be maintained. Therein lies the continued existence of our people. If you become allied with the Cuthites, I must leave you.”

Bar Kochba turned defiantly away.

"Go, then," he cried. "Not with interpreters of the law, but with dauntless warriors shall I conquer the Romans. I am weary of being held like a child in leading strings by you and your colleagues."

"You are mistaken," replied Rabbi Akiba gently, "if you think that ambition or lust of power move me to urge my counsel and my attitude upon you. These baser passions are far removed from my heart. I have lived now more than three quarters of a century. I have learned much and always kept my eyes open, testing and investigating. I have no other wish or longing than that of glorifying the holy name. I believed that you had been sent by God to sanctify His name on earth and to fulfill the prognostication of the prophet: 'On that day, God will be one and His name one.' It was a fatal error that held me spellbound. Now that I am leaving you, it is the duty to sanctify the name of God that drives me hence. May God have mercy on you and our people."

## XLV.

“THIS, TOO, IS FOR THE BEST.”

On the next morning, Rabbi Akiba, accompanied by his pupil, Perez, left the city. This lad was the living proof of the love Rabbi Akiba bore his people and of the tender care with which he watched over the destinies of each individual.

The father of Perez had been a poverty-stricken fellow who had been addicted to all sorts of crimes and vices. Perez had not known him, for the father had died before the birth of the child; but the boy seemed to have inherited all the evil tendencies and passions of his progenitor. Even as a child, he was a source of constant vexation to the inhabitants of his native city, who thought anxiously of the time when Perez, as a fullgrown man, would, from all indications, be even worse than his father had been. Rabbi Akiba happened to visit the city, and he heard of the wild, intractable boy. He sought out the mother and asked her to place the child under his tutelage.

“You will free me and the entire city of a terrible nuisance,” said the mother, “if you take the unmanageable boy along with you.”

Rabbi Akiba took him away and attempted to instruct him in the Torah. But the boy was stubborn and refused to study. Rabbi Akiba persisted at his task with gentle patience; he prayed fervently to God that he might succeed in making the stony heart of the boy susceptible to the majesty of the Torah, and when, despite all this,

his efforts met with continued failure, he began a period of forty days' fasting. The boundless love and gentleness of the teacher finally conquered the hard heart of the boy. He began to study and soon reached the point of being able to understand a few sections of the Mishna and to say the mourner's prayer in the synagogue for his deceased father, the Kaddish which sons recite for the welfare of the souls of their departed parents. The Kaddish, in point of fact, contains no mention of the salvation of the soul; it is nothing more than a prayer in glorification of the holy name. But the Jew finds consolation in it for the bitterest sorrows of the heart. Everyone who dies with the acknowledgment of the unity of God upon his lips sanctifies His name, and everyone who lives is called upon to glorify the name of God. That is Israel's function, the aim and purpose of its life, and a son who says the Kaddish gladdens the souls of his deceased parents; for whosoever leaves behind a son who sanctifies the name of God has contributed towards the uninterrupted existence of Israel.

When Perez had recited the Kaddish in public for the first time, Rabbi Akiba, in a dream, heard a voice which said:

"I am the spirit of the father of your pupil, Perez. I thank you for the tender care which you have shown my son and which redounded also to my advantage. Since my son recited the Kaddish, I have been released from the torments whereby I had to expiate my many misdemeanors. May the all-merciful God grant you a rich reward for your nobly pious efforts."

Perez became unalterably attached to his teacher, and was happy whenever he could serve him.

The two left Jerusalem and turned to the south. Rabbi Akiba had taken along an ass, which bore his luggage, and a rooster, whose crowing awakened him early every morning. Rabbi Akiba and his pupil trudged along the entire day, and, when the sun had set, they sought lodgings for the night in the city of Sekonia. But the watchmen of the city refused to permit them to enter.

"We cannot admit anyone," they said. "The Romans are approaching, and a traitor could easily slink into our city under the guise of a harmless traveler."

"Shall my aged teacher spend the night in the open air, exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather?" asked Perez.

"I cannot help it," replied the sentinel.

"Do you know," asked Perez, "who it is that asks for admission? It is Rabbi Akiba, the renowned sage of Israel."

"Now I see," answered the sentinel, "that you are outright liars; Rabbi Akiba is with the king in Jerusalem, not roaming through the land."

He closed the gate, and the two were left alone without.

"Do not be grieved, Perez," said Rabbi Akiba. "All that God does is for the best. Let us take shelter in yonder woods and spend the night under the trees."

They entered a nearby forest and sought a suitable place to spend the night. Perez took two pieces of wood which he carried with him, and rubbed them together very adroitly, until they caught fire. He then kindled a lantern, which he had taken from the pack that had been tied to the donkey.

"That is proper," said Rabbi Akiba, when the light was burning in the lantern. "Now the wild beasts of the forest and the birds of prey will see us and be afraid of us, as we read: 'The fear and dread of you will be upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air'."

Scarcely had Rabbi Akiba finished when a mighty storm arose, and a strong gust of wind lifted the lantern, carried it some distance, and extinguished the light.

"What shall we do now, Rabbi?" asked Perez in distress.

"We shall have to get along without light," replied Rabbi Akiba. "Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the best."

Soon the storm subsided, and the ass and the rooster fell asleep. Rabbi Akiba and Perez lay down to rest upon the hard ground. Suddenly, a wild roar filled the silence of the night.

"What is that, Rabbi?" asked Perez, trembling.

"Be still, my son," answered Rabbi Akiba, "it is the roar of a lion. When the lion roars, who is not seized with terror?"

The mighty monarch of the beasts ran up with long leaps, sprang upon the ass, and slew it.

"Our meek pack-animal!" lamented Perez. "Who will carry our luggage?"

"Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the best," returned Rabbi Akiba. "Let us rejoice that the fierce beast of prey has at least spared us. Let us try to rest the remainder of the night, so that we may be able to continue our journey in the morning with renewed energy. The Guardian of Israel sleeps not, neither does He slumber."

No sooner had they fallen asleep when they were awakened by a resounding cry; an eagle darted from the air directly upon the rooster, killed it, and carried it off.

"Will the terrors of this night never cease?" asked Perez.

"Whatever the Almighty does is for the best; praised be His holy name," replied Rabbi Akiba resignedly.

Again all was still, and the two travelers fell asleep. Again they were aroused by a fearful clamor. They jumped up and saw fierce warriors, with burning torches in their hands, attacking the city of Sekonia.

"Silence," whispered Rabbi Akiba, "we must not make a sound; a scouting party of the Romans is attacking the city."

The Romans stormed the gates with their powerful battering-rams. In vain, the inhabitants of the city hurled missiles from the walls. To be sure, many a Roman soldier was struck and killed; but that did not deter the others. Soon a breach had been effected, and the besiegers entered the city. Shouts of battle and cries for quarter accompanied their advance. The soldiers robbed, plundered, and murdered, set fire to the city at all four of its corners, and then, as day broke, continued their march. Rabbi Akiba said to his pupil:

"Do you see how graciously God protected us? If we had been permitted to enter the city, we should have shared the fate of its inhabitants. The light of the lantern and the voice of either the ass or the rooster would have betrayed our presence to the Romans. Without a doubt, they would have searched for us, found us, and put us to death. God, therefore, hardened the heart of the watchman of the city, so that he unfeelingly refused

us shelter; for the same reason, the storm extinguished our light, the lion killed our ass, and the eagle carried off our rooster. Whatever the All-Merciful does is for the best. Praised be His holy name for ever and ever."

The two wayfarers resumed their journey. Rabbi Akiba wished to seek out some of his pupils in the southern part of the Holy Land who, far from the tumult of war, were devoting their lives exclusively to the study of the Law. The great man thought solely of the preservation of the Torah which was in danger of being forgotten. Of the thousands of pupils whom he and his colleagues had instructed, some had succumbed to the epidemic, some had been slain by the Romans, and some had now exposed themselves to the possibility of suffering death by joining the hopeless conflict that had been undertaken by Bar Kochba.

"We read in the Scriptures," said Rabbi Akiba to Perez: "'Sow thy seed in the morning and do not permit thy hand to rest in the evening.' If you have educated disciples in your youth, do not hesitate, even in your old age, to instruct the young; for you cannot know which will prove the more fruitful.<sup>1</sup> My pupils were numbered by the thousands; only a few remain who will be able to preserve the Divine teachings and to bequeath them to coming generations. In the South, there dwell four young men of whom I expect much for Israel. One is named Meir. Like me, he is descended from aristocratic, formerly heathen stock. He had once before joined the ranks of my pupils; but, at that time, he was too young, and could not follow my lectures.<sup>2</sup> Since then, he has received instruction from Elisha ben Abuyah, who is now

<sup>1</sup> Jebamoth 62b.

<sup>2</sup> Erubin 13a.

called 'Acher.' Meir does not permit himself to be misled by his teacher, he eats the pulp and throws away the shell. The second is named Jose, and is the son of my former colleague, Chalaphta. The third, Judah, is the son of another of my erstwhile colleagues, Illai. The fourth is called Nehemiah, and is a descendant of that Nehemiah who assisted Ezra in the rebuilding of the Jewish state after the return from the Babylonian exile. God grant that I may succeed in bringing it about that these young men become proficient in the study of the Law, so that Israel may not be orphaned."

Rabbi Akiba soon reached his destination, and found the four young men, who considered themselves fortunate to be permitted to sit at the feet of the great sage of Israel. But there was a fifth student with them—Simeon the son of Jochai.

"Ha," said Rabbi Akiba, when he perceived him, "are you not the scholar who once accused Rabbi Joshua before Rabban Gamaliel? Depart; you cannot become my pupil."

"Rabbi," replied the young man, "I cannot and will not renounce your instruction. My soul thirsts for the sacred lore as the panting stag longs for the mountain spring. If you refuse to accept me as a pupil, I shall have my father, Jochai, betray your whereabouts to the Romans."

"My son," said Rabbi Akiba, smiling, "I surely cannot resist such ferocity. The cow is more eager to suckle the calf than the calf is to suck."

"But who is in danger?" asked Simeon. "Is it not the calf, which, otherwise, would die of starvation? Rescue me, therefore, from this peril, and lay open to me the sources of your knowledge."

"First answer me one question," said Rabbi Akiba. "We read in the Scriptures: 'Thou shalt not tie up the mouth of the ox, when it threshes.' Is it permitted to tie up the mouth of the ox beforehand, and then lead it into the threshing-floor?"

"Thou nor thy sons may not drink wine or other intoxicants when thou comest to the tent of the congregation'," answered Simeon. "May the priest become intoxicated beforehand, and enter the sanctuary in this condition? Certainly not. In the same way, it is forbidden to lead the ox to the threshing-floor with its mouth gagged."<sup>1</sup>

"God bless you, my son," said Rabbi Akiba, "I shall no longer restrain you from entering the ranks of my pupils. God has called you for great things."

<sup>1</sup> Jerushalmi, Terumoth chap. 9; compare also Talmud Babli, Baba Mezia 90b.

## XLVI.

### THE WORM AT THE CORE.

Bar Kochba concluded a treaty of alliance with the leader of the Samaritans.

"Let my people be your people," said Manasseh, "let my army be your army; let us together meet the common enemy."

"Every injustice," replied Bar Kochba, "that is inflicted upon your people shall be avenged by me. Let all disputes between Jews and Samaritans be forgotten, all hate extinguished. Let us love one another as brothers and be one people for all times to come."

The fact that Rabbi Akiba had left the self-styled Messiah and departed from Jerusalem was scarcely noticed; for the report soon circulated that Julius Severus was approaching with a large and well-equipped army, which was burning the open cities and villages, slaying the inhabitants and devastating fields and vineyards. The erection of the sanctuary was immediately interrupted; the masons left their work, the priests and Levites ceased their preparations, the scholars discontinued their studies, and all assembled about Bar Kochba, ready to fight and to die for the fatherland. Yet the spirit which inspired the army had changed. Since Bar Kochba had allied himself with the Cuthites and Rabbi Akiba had left his side, the spirit of God seemed to have receded from him. Bar Kochba was now only a courageous general, a bold leader; but he no longer felt himself to be the messenger of God, appointed to establish the Divine kingdom of

peace and happiness. Previously, every one of his warriors had been imbued with this spirit, and had believed himself capable of performing miracles. Now all this had changed. Every soldier realized that the Almighty did not require the assistance of the Cuthites in order to establish His kingdom. The uprising had lost its sacredness; it was nothing more than a revolt against Roman domination. But even this feeling was strong enough to inflame the spirit of the warriors and to fire them on to deeds of the most amazing valor.

Bar Kochba left Jerusalem with his army, to advance against the enemy and engage him in open warfare. He was reinforced by the arrival of ten thousand Cuthites, under the leadership of Manasseh. The generals embraced in the sight of the two armies amid shouts of acclamation.

Suddenly, a messenger arrived, his clothes torn and covered with dust. He threw himself before Bar Kochba and cried: "I bring discouraging news, master! The Romans attacked Sekonia in the middle of the night, slew the inhabitants, robbed and plundered, and, finally, set fire to the city; I alone escaped to relate what has happened!"

Scarcely had the man finished speaking, when another came, in a similar state, bringing the same news of another city. Then followed another and still another; the reports of disaster were incessant, until, at last, the soldiers, too, heard of them, and raised their voices in loud weeping. Soon large bands of fugitives arrived, fleeing before the advance of the Romans; they told of the magnitude and power of the Roman army, which was covering the very surface of the land, as

numerous as when a country is smitten with a plague of locusts.

"King of Israel," said Manasseh, the leader of the Cuthites, "we cannot advance against the superior numbers of the Romans; we dare not risk an open battle, else we should be surely lost. Our soldiers are still inexperienced, whereas Severus is leading against us men who have been tried in hundreds of battles. But in the course of time, the very magnitude of the invading army will bring about its own destruction. Hunger and disease will attack its ranks, dispirit the soldiers, and finally exterminate them. Let us, therefore, retreat to Bethar. The city is large and strongly fortified; a vast supply of provisions is stored up there, sufficient to support not only us and our army but also all who may take refuge there. The Romans will dash their heads in vain against the solid walls of Bethar."

"Your advice is good," replied Bar Kochba, "let us retreat to Bethar."

Soon Jerusalem was again deserted. It was not long before the Romans entered and pulled down the walls of the Temple, which had only recently been put up. All the fortified cities which the Jews had captured fell once more into the hands of the Romans, who slew the inhabitants. Only a few escaped; some fled into the mountains and took refuge in rocky clefts, others went to Bethar, where they were kindly received and provided with some of the supplies that were stored there in great quantity.

A spirit of cheerfulness prevailed in Bethar itself; the inhabitants trusted in the strength of its walls and in the courage of their leader, Bar Kochba, who seemed to be in all places at once, and supervised everything. Work

was carried on day and night, the walls strengthened, and new fortifications were added. The inhabitants of Bethar and the soldiers of Bar Kochba's army confidently executed every command of their general. It was inconceivable that the Romans might conquer the city. The walls towered into the clouds, so that it was impossible to climb over them; moreover, they were so solid that they could not be affected by the catapults and battering-rams of the Romans. And if the enemies attempted to set up assaulting ladders, they would be shot down from the walls, and everyone who ventured too close would certainly meet his death. The enthusiasm of the soldiers and the inhabitants was shared even by the children. On one occasion, Bar Kochba was riding through the city just as the school-children were being dismissed; thousands of them surrounded his horse and cried out: "Long live the King of Israel!" One boy, indeed, pressed forward and exclaimed:

"Lead us out to battle with the heathens, O King of Israel. We children will transfix the idolaters with our very slate-pencils!"

Bar Kochba raised the child, kissed him, and asked:

"What is your name, my boy?"

"My name is Simeon," replied the lad; "I am the son of the deceased prince, Rabban Gamaliel."

"You are a worthy descendant of illustrious ancestors," said Bar Kochba. "God bless you, my child!"

This boy, a son of Rabban Gamaliel's old age, had, as has already been related, been sent by his relatives to Bethar after the death of his father, and was attending school there. Rabban Gamaliel also had an older son, whose wedding was described above. But the young Simeon was the son of a second wife, whom Rabban

Gamaliel had married late in life. This son had been born shortly before the death of the prince.

The siege had already lasted more than two years. The courage of the besieged, or, at least, of the Jews among them, was undaunted; but the Cuthites regretted having forsaken their former attitude towards the Jews and allied themselves with them. They had looked forward to victory and power and riches, had awaited freedom and independence from the hand of Bar Kochba, and now they had been deceived in all their expectations.

"How long yet are we to endure the misery of this siege?" Manasseh's servant, Ephraim, asked him one day.

"I would gladly make peace with the Romans," replied Manasseh, "and submit to their terms. But Bar Kochba will not hear of such a thing. At the meeting of the council yesterday Elasar Ha-Mudai, the uncle of the king, argued very warmly for peace; but the king addressed him roughly with the words: 'That is what you scholars always do! Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai secretly escaped from Jerusalem to the camp of the Romans. No, whoever speaks to me of peace and submission will be put to death!' I did not utter a word, as I was afraid to show that, in the depth of my soul, I was in accord with the Jewish scholars."

"Master," said Ephraim, "suppose we should make a secret treaty with the Romans and promise them our help; we could obtain for ourselves very favorable terms of peace."

"I should be more than ready to enter upon such a plan; but how can it be executed? The Jews distrust us and watch our every step. How could we send a message to the Romans?"

"Master, I was born in Bethar, and I know every inch of the city, which was built and fortified by the Romans many years ago. You know that the Romans are accustomed to dig underground passages in their fortresses, in order to preserve contact with the outer world in the event of a siege. Once I was playing with my comrades in the cellar of a house in this city. We found a trap-door, raised it, and discovered a stairway leading into the ground. At the foot of it we saw a passage-way, which extended for some distance and gradually led to the outside. At the end of the passage, we noticed an iron plate; we pushed it up, and found ourselves in a thicket, far from the city. We again closed up the passage-way and returned through it to the cellar. We must have caught a cold in the damp subterranean chamber; for my three friends and I all fell ill with inflammation of the throat. The three other boys died, so that I am the only one who has any knowledge of the existence of that underground passage. If you wish and order it, I shall make my way to the Romans in this fashion and hand over to them your message."

"Truly," said the leader of the Cuthites, "that seems to be the road to deliverance for us and our people. First of all, however, conduct me to that house, so that if a mishap should befall you, the knowledge of the subterranean passage should not be lost with you."

The house of which Ephraim had spoken was the property of a Cuthite, and so no one was surprised when Manasseh established his headquarters there. He had himself conducted into the cellar by his servant and found everything to be as Ephraim had reported. Then he composed a letter in which he promised to deliver the city to the Romans, as soon as Julius Severus would

assure him and all the Cuthites free departure and complete amnesty. Armed with this letter Ephraim set out to the camp of the Romans.

The Roman general had long been weary of the protracted siege. As the Romans had laid waste to the region far and wide, the supplies for the numerous host had to be brought from a great distance. As a result, the most necessary articles were frequently lacking. Disease had broken out in the ranks of the Romans and a large number of them had succumbed. Julius Severus had sent an embassy to Rome to entreat the Emperor to permit him to abandon the useless and galling siege. Instead of replying, Hadrian had come to Palestine to conduct the siege in person, and, if possible, to complete the subjugation of the Jews. Soon, however, the Emperor had become convinced that his experienced general was right, that Bethar was impregnable. He, too, had already made up his mind to abandon the seemingly impossible project and to withdraw from Bethar. Just then the soldiers brought in a prisoner who said he had a message from the beleaguered city. The prisoner was Ephraim the Cuthite.

## XLVII.

### TREACHERY.

Ephraim had returned to Bethar. He sought his master, but did not find him at home. The latter, in order to remove all semblance of suspicion, simulated a strong attachment for Judaism. Therefore, he attended the services at the great synagogue of Bethar regularly—morning, noon, and evening. Here, too, his servant Ephraim sought him. But the services were already over, and the synagogue was empty. Ephraim found only one worshipper in the empty hall; it was Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai, who was imploring God, in fervent prayer, to rescue the city.

"I believe this old man is so completely wrapt in devotion," said Ephraim to himself, "that if the Romans were to capture the city, he would take no notice of it. I shall see whether I can arouse his attention."

He stepped close to the worshipper and whispered into his ear:

"You old fool, what are you doing there? Your prayers will not save the city. The Romans will enter, and blood will flow in streams."

Ephraim had judged correctly; Rabbi Elasar did not hear what he said. Meanwhile, the sexton entered to lock up the synagogue. It seemed to him that Rabbi Elasar was deep in conversation with the Cuthite. He waited quietly until Ephraim left the synagogue to return to the dwelling of his master, whom he now found at home.

"Ah," cried Manasseh, "you have come back without misfortune? I have been awaiting your return impatiently. Tell me, what did you accomplish?"

"I have news of the highest significance for you. Emperor Hadrian himself is in the camp."

"Did you speak with him?"

"I was led into his presence and very graciously received. He grants all our requests. The Romans will be in the city within three days. Our people are to make themselves known to them by means of white bands to be worn about the sleeves. We are to open the gates and thus make it possible for the Romans to enter. Our reward is to include thorough pardon and extensive privileges for all Samaritans. The Emperor sends you his especial greeting, my master. He will elevate you and distinguish you with lofty dignities."

"This is certainly an excellent report that you bring. Take this purse of gold coins as the first installment of recompense. Later I shall be in a position to reward you even more richly."

Ephraim gratefully kissed his master's hand. Then he made his way to a tavern in order to forget, in his cups, the hardships he had endured. Here he found many boon companions, both Jews and Cuthites, who were discussing the condition of the city.

"The Romans are in a bad way," said Achijah, a Jewish captain. "I stood guard at the watch-tower, and we could see an endless procession of corpses being carried from the camp and buried."

"They cannot hold out much longer," said Abner, another captain; "I hope they will soon withdraw and leave us in peace."

"If they withdraw," exclaimed Asriel, a Jewish soldier, "we shall pursue them and fall upon them like destroying angels. Their retreat will then be converted into a wild flight, and we shall annihilate them as Gideon exterminated the Midianites. Their generals will fall into our hands like Oreb and Zeeb, like Zebach and Zalmunah."

In the meantime, Ephraim had been emptying one beaker after another. The strong wine which, contrary to his custom, he was drinking undiluted, had mounted to his head. He now sprang up and called out:

"Silly prattle! It will not be long before the Romans enter the city, destroy it, and give your corpses to the beasts of the field and the birds of the air."

All those in the tavern arose and rushed upon Ephraim.

"Accursed Cuthite," cried Achijah, "you are a traitor! You must die by my hand!"

The other Cuthites interceded to protect their co-religionist.

"Let him alone, Achijah," shrieked Abimelech, a Cuthite captain. "I know him, he is a servant of our general, Manasseh. Do not touch a hair of his head, or I shall slay you outright!"

"Be calm, brothers," cried Abner, interfering. "Shall a quarrel break out between Jews and Cuthites? Shall we murder one another and thereby make it easier for the Romans to capture the city?"

"Shall we tolerate treachery in our midst?" yelled Asriel, flaming with rage.

"Let us lead the man before the king," said Abner; "let him be the judge. If he deserves death, the king will sentence him."

This proposal was approved by all who were present, Jews as well as Cuthites. Ephraim was seized and led before Bar Kochba.

"Master," began Achijah, "this Cuthite affirmed with certainty that the Romans would enter the city within a few days. The wine in him was forcing him to speak, and you know well that 'when wine enters, secrets are revealed.' The man is a traitor. You are in possession of Divine wisdom; seek to fathom his treachery."

Ephraim had now become sober. Trembling in all his limbs, he said: "It is true, the wine in me was speaking. But I am no traitor. I am a loyal servant of your friend and ally, Manasseh."

"Tell me the whole truth!" Bar Kochba ordered domineeringly.

"I know nothing, I know nothing!" whined Ephraim.

"Speak," cried the king, "speak of your own accord, or I shall compel you to speak."

In a flash, Ephraim formed a diabolical plan. He had learned from his master that Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai had pleaded for peace and submission in the council-meeting. Upon this fact he spun a web of lies with which he intended to deceive Bar Kochba.

"Master," he said, "I shall be put to death, no matter what I reveal or hide. You will kill me if I remain silent; you will kill me if I tell the truth."

"Speak the truth," answered Bar Kochba, "and your life will be spared."

"Thanks for this promise, O King!" cried Ephraim in glee. "I shall withhold nothing, but tell only the truth. An old Rabbi, who is called Elasar Ha-Mudai, challenged me to devise plans together with him whereby to deliver the city into the hands of the Romans. This very after-

noon I had a conference with him in the great synagogue. 'My son,' said he, 'the city is lost. Let us seek to save as much as possible, as Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai did during the siege of Jerusalem. Let us follow the example of the wise woman in Abel Beth Maacha, who had the head of Sheba ben Bichri thrown over the walls, so that Joab withdrew from the city, and all was saved.'

"What," cried Bar Kochba, horrified, "is my uncle plotting to take my life?"

"He is," replied Ephraim. "He hired me to assassinate you, and he gave me a purse filled with gold as the first instalment of my reward. It was the possession of so much money that enticed me into the tavern, where I imbibed so generously of wine that I uttered those thoughtless words. Here is the gold that Rabbi Elasai Ha-Mudai gave me."

At these words, he showed the gold which his master had given him.

"I cannot believe it, cannot believe it," exclaimed Bar Kochba. "Summon my uncle!"

Several servants quickly departed to bring Rabbi Elasar to the king.

"Traitor," said the latter to the quaking Ephraim, "what did I do to you that you were ready to shed my blood?"

"Master," answered Ephraim, "you cannot imagine how the old man urged me; how eloquently he proved to me that it is a deed pleasing in the sight of God to kill an individual in order to save hundreds of thousands of innocent persons."

Bar Kochba paced the room excitedly.

"That is the way they are," he murmured, "these fanatics, these scholars! They do not respect even the

ties of blood, if they think that they must follow higher principles!"

"‘He is not the anointed of the Lord,’ said he," Ephraim continued, "‘otherwise he would slay the Romans with the breath of his mouth. Akiba, too, has deserted him—’"

"Ha, ha," shrieked Bar Kochba, "Akiba, that is the sore spot! There can be no doubt of it, they are plotting against my life."

Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai was led in.

"What does my king command?" he asked.

"Your king? Do you still acknowledge me as your king?"

"Why should I not?"

"Well, we shall see whether you have remained loyal to me or have become a traitor. Look at this man."

Rabbi Elasar gazed at Ephraim in amazement.

"What have I to do with him?" he asked. "I do not know him."

"You do not know him? Did you not engage him to murder me, and to demand mercy of the Romans in return for my head?"

"How can you, o king, believe such a thing of me? I do not know this man; I have never to my knowledge, even seen him; I have never exchanged a word with him,"

"What an audacious lie!" exclaimed Ephraim. "The sexton of the great synagogue saw us conversing."

"Fetch the sexton," commanded Bar Kochba.

The order was carried out.

"This person," said Rabbi Elasar, "is either a madman or a liar; I repeat; I do not know him and have never spoken with him. To be sure, I see a catastrophe near at

hand and wish to avert it; but by no other means than by fervent prayers which I breathe to God the Almighty."

The sexton was led in.

"Do you know this man?" Bar Kochba asked him.

"Who does not know Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai?"

"And that one?" queried the king again, pointing to Ephraim.

"I know him only by sight. This afternoon, he came into the synagogue after the services. The house of worship was empty. No one was there but Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai, who, in accordance with his custom, continues to pray long after the others have left the synagogue. More than an hour had passed, after the conclusion of the services, when I entered the synagogue to lock up. There I found these two men conferring together."

At these words, an overmastering fit of wrath took possession of Bar Kochba, so that he sprang furiously toward his uncle.

"Traitor," he screamed, "do you still dare to deny your black treachery? You employed this man to murder me. Wretch, I trample you under foot."

He raised his foot and smote the trembling old man with tremendous force. Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai fell to the ground mortally wounded.

"What have you done?" he said in a voice choked by the death-rattle. "You have killed your most faithful friend. O God, do not punish him for this, be merciful to him and my people!"

At these words he expired.

## XLVIII.

### THE BACK AGAINST THE WALL.

The ninth day of the month Ab, that day which played so unhappy a role in the history of Israel, the day on which the first Temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the second Temple many centuries later, by Titus, this day had arisen and filled the besieged inhabitants of Bethar with gloomy premonitions. Since the alleged Messiah had killed the venerable and pious Rabbi Elasar Ha-Mudai, his own uncle, the spirit of God seemed to have departed from him, and sombre melancholy had taken hold of him. Even his formerly courageous warriors appeared to have lost their confidence in their leader. The siege had now lasted two and a half years. The heaps of provisions were still far from being consumed, and the beleaguered city lacked not for food, drink, and the other necessities of life. The Romans, however, apparently had no intention of lifting the siege. On the contrary, they had recently become much more active and their attacks and assaults much more violent. The cause of the unusual bustle was the arrival of the Emperor in the camp, of which the besieged were still in ignorance.

Suddenly the cry of "treachery, treachery" resounded in the streets of Bethar. Armed Romans had ascended from the very womb of the earth. Bar Kochba was immediately on the spot. He commanded his men to invest the house from which the Romans were issuing. But the

Cuthites protected the house, and were strengthened every moment by fresh reinforcements of Roman soldiers.

“Manasseh,” Bar Kochba shouted to the leader of the Cuthites, “are you a traitor?”

“I am no traitor,” replied the Cuthite. “We were willing to help the Messiah, but you are not the anointed of the Lord!”

“Akiba,” shrieked Bar Kochba in despair, “you warned me against this brood of liars; o, if I had only not turned a deaf ear to your words!”

A frightful struggle now ensued. Veritable rivers of blood flowed; Bar Kochba performed herculean feats. Romans and Cuthites fell under the irresistible strokes of his huge sword. The house was soon taken, and the secret passage-way discovered and barricaded.

While Bar Kochba was devoting his entire attention to this one point, another division of the Cuthites, under the leadership of Ephraim, had been engaged in opening the gate for the Romans. But they had encountered stubborn resistance, and had been repulsed. When Bar Kochba appeared upon the scene of hostilities, the danger here had also been averted. At this moment, however, the Roman general ordered an assault upon the fortress. The strength of the besieged was dissipated. They had to combat the Romans without and the Cuthites within, and so the Roman battering-rams at last succeeded in effecting a breach. Impetuously the Romans rushed in.

Every person in Bethar had become a soldier. Men, women, and children paid little heed to their lives, but placed themselves in serried ranks in the path of the oncoming Romans. A horrible massacre was the result. Bar Kochba stood at the head of his loyal followers and

wrought miracles. Barehanded, he hurled mighty rocks upon the Romans, so that many of them were crushed to death.

"Bar Kesiba," called out Ephraim, "cease this useless resistance and surrender!"

"Traitor!" roared Bar Kochba and threw a stone at his head.

Ephraim tottered and fell, exclaiming:

"Your uncle was innocent, and you are his murderer!"

When Bar Kochba heard this, he trembled.

"Woe unto me," he said, "I am lost! O God, forgive me my guilt and do not let me fall into the hands of my foes!"

Bar Kochba had leaned his back against a wall to support his exhausted limbs. A prodigious serpent, which had been lying, coiled up, near the wall, attacked the hero, with a hiss, and instantaneously wrapped itself about him. Bar Kochba fell dead to the ground. Romans and Cuthites alike raised a shout of triumph. A Cuthite cut off the hero's head, to hand it over to the Emperor as a trophy of victory.

Despite the death of their general, the courage of the Jews did not wane. To be sure, they knew that all hope of victory was lost, but they did not wish to fall into the hands of the Romans; they preferred to die, and, in dying, to shed the blood of their adversaries. The consequence was a slaughter which has never been equalled in history. Five hundred and eighty thousand Jews and Jewesses, including greybeards and children, had assembled in Bethar; not a single one of them surrendered; practically all died the death of heroes. Only two of the many thousand children in the city escaped with their lives,

one of them Simeon, the son of Rabban Gamaliel. An old man had taken him by the hand and said to him: "You must not die, you are the scion of our royal line." He then led him into a concealed cellar-vault, whence after night-fall, they made good their escape from the city. When, later, Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel told of this event in a voice choked with tears, he applied to himself the Biblical verse: "My eye weeps for me more than for all my comrades" (Ecclesiastes III 51). He, too, would rather have died. To survive and to behold the fearful misery was worse than death.

The Romans had also suffered great losses, so that when Hadrian sent to Rome his report of the capture of Bethar, he did not venture to add the usual formula: "I and the army are in good condition," but spoke only of his own unimpaired health; he had remained at a safe distance, thus exposing himself to no danger.

Hadrian emptied the vials of his wrath upon the remnant of the Jews. Tinius Rufus was installed as criminal judge. The half-constructed Temple was again destroyed and the temple in honor of Jupiter once more erected. To irritate the Jews, the head of a swine was set up at the south gate of the city; furthermore, they were forbidden to walk along the circular walls. The severest penalties were threatened for the observance of the Jewish laws—circumcision, the celebration of the Sabbath, study of the Torah, dwelling in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles, or putting on the phylacteries. Every day, men and women were brought to trial by the Roman spies and accused of observing the Jewish religious precepts. They were then horribly tortured to death. Rabbi Akiba beheld the sufferings of his people and pity filled

his heart. At the risk of being seized and executed by the Romans, he left his place of concealment and went to Lydda. Here he found refuge in the house of a man named Nitsah. Messengers were sent out to call together to this place the remainder of the Sanhedrin. Alas, only a few of its members were still alive! Most of Rabbi Akiba's colleagues either had died or suffered martyrdom, or were not to be found in their hiding places. Of those who appeared, only the names of Rabbi Tarphon and Rabbi Jose the Galilean are recorded. The sages held a secret conference in an attic-chamber.<sup>1</sup>

"My friends," Rabbi Akiba addressed his colleagues; "a time of sore distress has come to Jacob. We, however, have not come together to moan and wail, but to deliver the remnant of our people from downfall. The Roman Emperor has placed the penalty of death upon the observance of our law, as did the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, before him. It seems as though the remnant of Israel is doomed to the sword of the executioner. It is our duty to instruct the sons and daughters of our people how far they are obligated to accept death rather than violate the law, and in what cases they may save their lives through transgression."

"You know, Akiba," said Rabbi Tarphon, "that our great teacher, Rabbi Elieser, taught that the Jew is in duty bound to suffer death rather than to accept idolatry. On the same plane with the worship of idols stand the cardinal sins of murder and incest. The transgression of these three prohibitions must be avoided even at the cost of one's life. As far as the other Divine commandments are concerned we are permitted, in case of life and

<sup>1</sup> Jerushalmi, Shebiit, chap. 4, Halachah 2.

death, to circumvent or even transgress them, as we read: 'You shall observe my laws and my statutes, which a man must practice in order that he live'—but not that he die." <sup>1</sup>

"But if it is a question," put in Rabbi Jose the Galilean, "of turning the Jews away from the laws of God, they are not permitted to transgress even the pettiest law in order to purchase their lives thereby. Consequently, it is our duty to admonish the sons and daughters of our people to practice the commandments as secretly as possible so that they may not come into conflict with the Romans. The booths for the Feast of Tabernacles should be constructed in such a way that they cause no comment. In particular, publicity should be, as far as possible, avoided. But if anyone should publicly be compelled to violate a law, no matter if this law, in comparison with others, seem ever so small, he is obliged to prefer death to transgression."

"My friend Jose has expounded correctly," said Rabbi Akiba, "and we must instruct the remnant of Judah in these sentiments. But I must call one additional matter to your attention. We can recommend secrecy in the practice of all the statutes. If one or another commandment is not fulfilled under the present circumstances it will be practiced all the more carefully when the storm which now threatens us will have blown over. But there is one matter which can suffer no restriction, even in times of the greatest peril; this is the study of the Divine teachings. If it were to be restricted, the roots from which new life will sprout in the future will waste away. The study of the Torah resembles a long chain

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus XVIII 5—Sanhedrin 74a.

which extends from Sinai down to the remotest ages of the future. Every generation forms a link in this chain, and binds the future to the past. If one generation should neglect the study of the law, the Torah would be lost to posterity. To be sure, deeds, not study, are the essentials in Judaism, as our teachers have taught us. One who studies and does not act in accordance with what he has learned, resembles the farmer who sows but does not reap. Yet, of itself, study is more important than acts; for no one would know what to do if he did not receive instruction. The study of the Torah, therefore, must not be restricted; neither must it be concealed, even at the risk of having the tyrant impose the penalty of death upon those who learn."

Then all arose and exclaimed with one accord:

"In sooth, learning is more than doing, for only through learning does doing become possible."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Midrash to the "Song of Songs," II 14.

## XLIX.

### PLUCKING THE FRUIT.

An era of frightful persecution now came upon Judaea. The Jews were exposed to the caprice of the Romans and their lust for plunder. A murder committed upon a Jew was punished with only a nominal fine.\* Emperor Hadrian set the example for malicious treatment of the vanquished; he did not allow the corpses of those slain in Bethar to be interred, and, therefore, the sages consider it a miracle that the dead bodies did not putrefy and spread disease and death by their foul odors. On one occasion, when Hadrian was riding through the country in the company of a large train, a Jew approached and reverently greeted him.

"Dog," cried the Emperor, "do you dare to greet me? Hang him to the nearest tree!"

The unfortunate man was immediately seized and hanged. A few days later, another Jew had the misfortune to meet the Emperor. Remembering Hadrian's earlier decree, the miserable fellow cowered at the foot of a wall and sought to escape the eyes of the Emperor.

"See that Jew there," shouted Hadrian; "he has the audacity to refuse to greet his monarch and to show him due respect. Hang him!"

At this, one of the Emperor's courtiers stepped forward and said:

"All-powerful Caesar, divine Emperor, would you be good enough to explain to your servants the wisdom

\*Gittin 55b.

of your decrees? A few days ago, you had an unfortunate fellow hanged because he greeted you, and to-day you wish to sentence another to death because he failed to greet you!"

"Ha, ha," laughed the Emperor, "I am not concerned whether or not the Jews greet me, I am interested only in hanging them."<sup>1</sup>

The Roman Empire had been shaken to its very foundation by the revolt of the Jews under Bar Kochba. The task of putting down the rebellion proved exceedingly costly. None of the Roman generals were able to succeed, so that Julius Severus, whom Hadrian envied and hated, had to be summoned from distant Britain. As soon as the campaign came to an end, Hadrian sent the victorious general back to the remote islands of the North Sea. The Roman senate refused the Emperor the honor of a triumphal procession, because he had not himself gained the victory. All this goaded Hadrian to merciless rage against the Jews. Magnanimity had never been a trait of his character; selfishness, capriciousness, and wantonness were, especially towards the end of his life, his most significant characteristics.

Since the Emperor was imbued with such a spirit of hatred towards the Jews, it seemed only natural that the officials who had been appointed by him, with Tinius Rufus at their head, should imitate him closely. Everyone who was detected practicing the religious precepts was punished most sternly, was, as a matter of fact, sentenced to death and then executed by the most excruciating tortures. The Romans were supported in all this by Jewish traitors and informers. Acher, in par-

<sup>1</sup> Midrash to Ecclesiastes.

ticular, himself versed in the law, was best qualified to put the Roman authorities on the scent. He drove the children from the schools and compelled them to learn trades; he betrayed every circumvention of the Roman decrees, and thereby brought unspeakable agony upon the members of his own race.<sup>1</sup>

During all this, Rabbi Akiba was living undisturbed in the southern part of the country and carrying on his educational activity. After the Jewish people had suffered a defeat such as it had never before experienced, all appeared to be lost. More than a half-million corpses covered the fields in Bethar and the vicinity. The remnant of Israel was subjected to ceaseless persecution; the best and noblest were daily being executed. The most revolting disillusionment had succeeded the hopes which had risen so high upon the appearance of the ostensible Messiah. But the great heart of Rabbi Akiba did not succumb to despair. With unshaken energy, the hoary sower scattered again his seed, after the fruits of the exertions of so many years had virtually all been destroyed.

Our sages tell us that the countenance of Moses resembled the sun and that of Joshua the moon; for, as the moon receives its light from the sun, so Joshua shone from the light reflected from Moses. Rabbi Akiba, too, resembled the sun; but he was surrounded by no less than five moons. Each of his disciples had assumed the responsibility for a special section of the field of Jewish knowledge. Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Nehemiah confined their attention particularly to the legal aspect of the sacred lore. The laws (Halachoth) of Rabbi Meir, which he had received from his teacher, Rabbi

<sup>1</sup>Jerushalmi, Chagiga, Chap. 2. Halachah 1.

Akiba later formed the foundation for the six divisions of the Mishna, which Rabbenu Judah the Holy, the son of that Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel, whose acquaintance we made at the destruction of Bethar, compiled and transcribed in conjunction with his colleagues and pupils. The laws which Rabbi Nehemiah received from his teacher, Rabbi Akiba, formed the basis for the Tosephta, which Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Hoshiah, the disciples and colleagues of Rabbi Judah the Holy, compiled and set down in writing. The Tosephta, taken by and large, has practically the same content as the Mishna; only the form occasionally varies, so that it is now briefer and now more detailed; the Tosephta, therefore, is peculiarly adapted to shed light on obscure portions of the Mishna. Rabbi Judah ben Illai, the third of Rabbi Akiba's disciples, adopted, as his own, his master's method of tracing the Halacha directly to Holy Writ. He is the originator of those interpretations of the third, fourth, and fifth books of the Pentateuch which are preserved under the name Sifra and Sifri. Rabbi Jose ben Chalaphta, Rabbi Akiba's fourth pupil, of whom the sages tell us that he penetrated to the very bottom of sacred lore, in addition to his proficiency in legal exegesis, inherited his teacher's historical genius, and his works, Seder Olam Rabba and Seder Olam Sutta, contain the dates which he had received from Rabbi Akiba. The fifth, and by no means least important, pupil of the great master was Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai. He, too, became expert in the law; but, in addition, he was a student of the secret science, Cabala, of which Rabbi Akiba was so great a master. Rabbi Simeon became the actual bearer of this branch of divine teachings, and his contemporaries said of him: "Happy is the age in which

Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai lives!" In point of fact, he became the teacher of the above-mentioned Rabbi Judah the Holy.

While Rabbi Akiba was devoting all his energies to his educational undertakings, his second wife, Rufina, the former spouse of Tinius Rufus, stood at his side in self-sacrificing love and indulgent tenderness, and beautified the evening of his life.

Rabbi Akiba was accustomed to teach in the open field, under the shade of a fig-tree. The possessor of this field was named Papus ben Judah; he was a grandson of that Papus ben Judah who, at the beginning of our narrative, had sued for the hand of Kalba Sabua's daughter, Rachel. He would come every day, in the very midst of the lecture, to pluck the ripened figs. This caused Rabbi Akiba, one day, to ask his scholars: "Does this man, by any chance, suspect us of eating of his figs?" To avoid this suspicion, he chose another spot for his discourses. Soon Papus approached him and said: "Master, why have you abandoned the shade of my fig-tree?" "Because," answered Rabbi Akiba, "you came each day to pluck the ripe figs, so that I was led to believe that you suspected us of appropriating them." "I entreat you," said Papus, "please resume your lecture under my fig-tree."

Rabbi Akiba complied with this request, and Papus did not again come to look after his figs. One day some of them fell from the tree; they had become worm-eaten and inedible. Whereupon Rabbi Akiba said to his pupils: "My children, just as the owner of the fig-tree

knows when it is time to pluck the figs, so the Almighty knows precisely the moment at which it is proper to remove an individual from the earth."<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Akiba was now a very old man; but his eyes had not become dim, nor had his spiritual and physical powers been diminished. He carried on his work with overflowing energy and keen, almost youthful, vigor. One hot day, when the sultriness of the atmosphere weighed especially heavy, the pupils began to lose their power of concentration and to fall asleep. Thereupon, Rabbi Akiba smilingly put the question: "What was the name of the woman who gave birth to six hundred thousand children at one time?" Immediately, the pupils were wide awake; but no one could solve the riddle. Finally, Rabbi Akiba said: "The name of that woman was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi and the wife of Amram; she bore our peerless master, Moses, who alone was the equal of all the six hundred thousand men of Israel."

On another hot day, the pupils were again in the same lazy mood. This time Rabbi Akiba addressed to them the following question: "How did Esther attain to the lofty dignity of ruler of one hundred and twenty-seven great provinces?" When the quickly aroused students declared themselves unable to solve the riddle, Rabbi Akiba said: "It was through the merits of our ancestress, Sarah, that Esther rose so high. As Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years, Esther became queen over one hundred and twenty-seven countries."

Thus did the venerable sage display his mental keenness in advanced age.

<sup>1</sup> Jerushalmi, Berachoth.

There was no lack of admonishing voices to supplicate Rabbi Akiba to cease his public educational activity and to point out to him the risk he was running. Once Papus ben Judah said to him:

"Do you not know, Rabbi, that the Romans have forbidden, upon pain of death, the study of the Torah? Do you not fear to be arrested and put to death?"

"Papus," said Rabbi Akiba, "let me tell you a parable. A fox was once walking along the bank of a river, and he saw the fishes swimming downstream in flight. 'Fishes,' asked the fox, 'why are you fleeing?' 'We are fleeing,' replied the fishes, 'from the men who are lying in wait to catch us in their nets.' 'Come to me,' cried the fox, 'and I shall conceal you in the forests far from the traps of men.' 'Are you the fox,' asked the fishes in amazement, 'who is deemed so wise and cunning? Water is the element in which we live, and if we are not safe here, how can we find refuge on dry land, where we would die at once?' Papus, the Torah is the element in which we live, as we read: 'It is thy life and the length of thy days.' If we should forsake it, Judah would, of necessity, die and its name disappear from the face of the earth. The Torah remains our life and the mainstay of our existence; in it, alone, can we find protection."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Berachoth 61b.

## L.

### IMPRISONED.

It has been related above that the conspiracy of Bar Kochba occurred immediately after Rufina had become divorced from her husband. On that occasion, Tinius Rufus had to flee so hurriedly, that he had not had the time to concern himself with the fate of his wife. During the war and immediately thereafter, he found no leisure to think of anything else. Now, after the country had resumed its normal aspect, he was seized with the longing to possess the beautiful woman whom he had formerly called his own. He sent out spies to discover what had become of her and soon he received the astounding report that she had married the venerable Rabbi Akiba. He at once gave orders to have Rabbi Akiba closely watched and arrested, together with his wife, at the very first opportunity.

On the fifth day of the month of Tishri, emissaries of the Roman governor entered Rabbi Akiba's academy and carried off both him and his wife. Rabbi Akiba was thrown into prison, but Rufina was conducted into the presence of her former husband.

Tinius Rufus stretched both arms toward her.

"Come to my heart, Rufina," he cried; "all that ever separated us shall be forgiven and forgotten!"

"I am the wife of another," replied Rufina; "I have become a Jewess."

"I am aware of the fact, but that cannot stand between us; the other man has incurred the penalty of

death, and you may, so far as I am concerned, remain a Jewess, provided only that you will be my wife."

"Do you for one moment think that the spouse of the wise, great-hearted Rabbi Akiba could again become the wife of that butcher of men, Tinius Rufus?"

"You call me a butcher of men? I only execute the orders of the Emperor. Rufina, I entreat, I implore you, be my wife again. I have almost died from longing for you. Demand of me whatever you desire, it shall be yours. I shall even spare the life of Rabbi Akiba on your account. Be mine once more, I beseech you."

"Rufus, I can never again become your wife. If I could save the life of the noble Rabbi Akiba by sacrificing my own, I should do so with joy. But the price that you impose upon me is too dear."

"Rufina, I shall give you time to consider my proposal. If you voluntarily become my wife, Akiba will go free; if not, he will suffer a death of martyrdom such as no man has ever yet experienced."

"Your threats are as ineffectual as your supplications. Rabbi Akiba will gladly die for God and His teachings, for which he has lived so long and done so much."

At this, Tinius Rufus had his former wife imprisoned.

The pupils of Rabbi Akiba followed him to Ceasarea. One of them, Joshua of Gerasa, daily brought him water wherewith to wash his hands. One day, the jailer met him and asked: "Where are you going with all this water? Do you wish to flood the prison?" And he took the jug and emptied the major part of its contents. When the hour approached for Rabbi Akiba to eat his bit of bread, he said to Joshua:

"Hand me the water, that I may wash my hands."

"Rabbi," answered Joshua, "the jailer poured out most of the water. The remainder will scarcely suffice for you to drink."

"What shall I do?" asked Rabbi Akiba. "The sages have forbidden us to eat bread without first having washed our hands, and he who transgresses the precepts of the sages is guilty of death. I should prefer to die of starvation than to offend by a transgression."

Joshua departed and gave the warden a large sum of money in return for the permission to provide his teacher with water. Not until this had been settled did Akiba wash his hands and appease his hunger. The Rabbis were astonished at the care with which Rabbi Akiba, despite his advanced age and his residence in prison, observed the religious precepts.

"How great," they exclaimed, "must his piety have been in his years of strength and freedom!"<sup>1</sup>

As Rufina consistently refused to grant the wish of Tinius Rufus, the latter aggravated Rabbi Akiba's imprisonment. None of his pupils were permitted to visit him. Once the sages were asked a legal question which they did not venture to decide. According to the Jewish law, a divorced wife who has re-married, may not return to her first husband, if she is divorced from her second husband, or the latter dies. On that occasion, the question concerned a girl who had married as a minor and who had absolved her second marriage, not by a bill of divorce, but by the simple refusal to live with her husband which is permitted by the law. Could such a woman return to her first husband or not?

<sup>1</sup> Erubin 21b.

For four hundred gold pieces the sages hired a messenger who knew how to obtain entrance into the prison in order to obtain Rabbi Akiba's decision. The latter declared such a marriage forbidden.\*

Not long afterward the sages were confronted with another difficulty which also arose out of the Jewish laws of marriage. A woman had given her brother-in-law "Chaliza" (the ceremony of taking off the shoe whereby marriage with a brother-in-law is rendered unnecessary) in the prison in which both were confined, without the presence of the required court of three men. Was this act valid or not? The Rabbis were afraid to answer this question. But they were unable to find anyone who would venture, even for a large sum of money, to get the ear of Rabbi Akiba in his cell. One of his pupils, therefore, Rabbi Jochanan of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>, disguised himself as a peddler and went about the city with all kinds of wares. He entered the court-yard of the prison and called out: "Who wishes to buy needles or yarn, what is the status of Chaliza which is performed between a woman and her brother-in-law in the presence of no witnesses?"

Immediately, Rabbi Akiba appeared at the window of his cell and cried out: "Have you spindles (Kashin), the act is valid (Kasher)!"<sup>2</sup>

We are told of a third decision which Rabbi Akiba made while in prison. A conflict arises in the reckoning of the Jewish calendar, from the fact that the years are solar, whereas the months are lunar, periods of time. No

\*Jebamoth 108b.

<sup>1</sup> Also called Ha-Sandler (the cobbler); compare Jerushalmi, Chagiga, chap. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Jerushalmi, Jebamoth, chap. 12, Halacha 5; compare also Babli, Jebamoth 105b.

people has such a model calendar-reckoning as have the Jews. The Christian nations have correct years, but incorrect months. They simply divide the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year into twelve months which have no connection whatsoever with the periodicity of the moon. The Mohammedan peoples have correct months but incorrect years. They merely make the year comprise twelve months. But since the period of the orbit of the moon is somewhat over twenty-nine and a half days, the month has alternately twenty-nine and thirty days, and the years, correspondingly, three hundred and fifty-four days. Consequently, the year of the Mohammedans is eleven days too short, from which it results that their months and festivals are not connected with the seasons, but gradually recede, so that they occur now in spring, later in winter, still later in autumn, and finally in summer, until they appear again at spring. The Mohammedan months and festivals thus make the complete cycle of the seasons in the space of thirty-three years. With the Jews things are different; their calendar-reckoning is in every respect, precise and correct. Their months are fixed in accordance with the revolution of the moon, whereas their years are solar. This is brought about by means of the leap year in which an entire month is added. There are seven leap-years in a cycle of nineteen years, whereby the difference of two hundred and ten days is equalized.

The institution of the leap-year was in charge of the Sanhedrin at the time of our story. During the uprising of Bar Kochba and long after, during the persecutions of Hadrian, no decision concerning the insertion of the leap-year could be reached. The Jewish calendar was in danger of falling into confusion. The Passover festi-

val must always occur in spring; it must be celebrated in the month in which the ears of corn blossom in the Holy Land. The Feast of Tabernacles must always fall in the autumn; it must be celebrated in the month in which the vintage is brought to a close in the Holy Land. But several leap years had already not been inserted, and it had become necessary to make up what had been lost. However, it was an unalterable principle not to have two leap-years follow in succession, and now the necessity had arisen of inserting no less than three. Of all the sages of Israel, Rabbi Akiba was the only one in a position to determine what should be done. He was the leader of Israel, but he was in prison, and his release was hardly to be expected. Only after the very gravest of risks was his decision obtained. He declared that there should be three successive leap-years, but ruled that the leap-year must henceforth be instituted and announced on each occasion by the court of three.

Tinius Rufus had his former wife brought before him every day, and stormed her with prayers and entreaties. She, however, steadfastly rejected all his advances. On the day preceding the Day of Atonement, Rufina was standing before Rufus.

"I ask you for the last time," he said: "will you become my wife again?"

"I have repeated often enough," replied Rufina, "that I hate and detest you."

"Beloved, adored woman," pleaded Rufus, "whom I once called mine; be merciful with me. I shall do everything you wish, I shall even have myself circumcised and embrace Judaism!"

"You could never become a devout, God-fearing Jew. The number of your crimes is too large, and love

of God cannot enter your stony heart. But even if you were to become a Jew, I, who have been the wife of the noblest and wisest of men, could not debase myself to the extent of marrying you again. We read in the Scriptures: 'There never arose a prophet like Moses.' Moses had not his peer among the prophets; but among the sages there is a man who can be placed beside Moses, and that man is Rabbi Akiba,<sup>1</sup> whom I am fortunate enough to call my husband. Should I, then, so degrade myself as to become once more the wife of a Tinius Rufus?"

"Ha," screamed Tinius Rufus, "I shall know how to compel you. My patience is at an end, and what I cannot obtain by kindness, I shall gain by violence."

"You will never force me, Rufus," said Rufina calmly. "I shall remain the wife of Rabbi Akiba until the end of my days, in purity and chastity. If I am separated from him here on earth, there will be a reunion in the realm of eternal bliss."

At these words, she drew forth a dagger and plunged it into her heart. Rufus sprang toward her,—but it was too late; Rufina sank lifeless to the ground.

<sup>1</sup> Yalkut Reubeni.

## LI.

### LIFE IN DEATH.

While the events just recounted were taking place in the palace of the governor, Papus ben Judah was made prisoner and conducted into the cell of Rabbi Akiba.

"Well, Papus," said Rabbi Akiba, "you gave me such excellent advice with regard to warding off death. Was not your wisdom able to protect you?"

Papus sighed.

"You are fortunate, Rabbi Akiba," he said, "that you suffer for the sake of the divine teachings, whereas I am condemned to death for totally indifferent matters. The avarice of the governor makes him lust after my beautiful estate, and, therefore, all sorts of false accusations have been leveled against me, in order that my estate may be confiscated."

After the death of Rufina, the rage of Tinius Rufus burned fiercely against Rabbi Akiba. He pronounced the sentence of death upon him, and ordered that he be executed by means of the most horrible tortures.

Early in the morning of the Day of Atonement, Rabbi Akiba was led into the court-yard of the prison. A vast throng had assembled. Tinius Rufus was seated on a dais, for he intended to feast his eyes and ears on his victim's agonies and screams of pain. It was a sad Day of Atonement; the expiatory sacrifice that is offered up on that day was, on this occasion, the teacher and father of his people. Matchless for wisdom, he had always been full of tender love for all his fellow-men.

Never had anyone heard a harsh word from him; he had taught clemency and indulgence even towards criminals. He had reached an exceedingly advanced age, yet his frame was still powerful, his eye undimmed, his spirit unbroken.

Rabbi Akiba was tied to a stake. The Roman hangman's assistants tore the flesh from his body with red-hot pincers; but not a cry of pain escaped his lips.

The sun was beginning to shed its health-giving light, and the eastern heavens glowed purple. Rabbi Akiba laid his hand upon his eyes, and exclaimed in a loud voice:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One! Praised be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever! And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy might."

"This man is a sorcerer," shouted Tinius Rufus. "He has drunk a magic potion to make him senseless to pain."

The pupils stepped closer to the place of execution of their master, and Rabbi Meir said:

"Rabbi, Rabbi, our heart bleeds that you must suffer so terribly."

"My beloved children," answered the Rabbi, "do not mourn for me! I have attained the goal of my desires. For eighty years, I have longed to sacrifice my life for the glorification of the holy name, as we read: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' How can one better attest to such boundless love than by giving up one's very life for the sanctification of the name of God?"

And again he proclaimed: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!"

As he pronounced the word "one" for the second time, he received a fatal thrust from one of his torturers, and his struggles were at an end.

Tinius Rufus had the corpse brought back into the prison and locked up in a cell; there it was to decay and rot. During the night after the close of the Day of Atonement, Rabbi Joshua of Gerasa was awakened from his sleep; a man was standing before him, who said:

"Arise, Rabbi, and help me to bury the body of our great master. I am a priest (Kohen) and need your assistance."

Rabbi Joshua quickly arose from his couch and followed the stranger. When they reached the prison, they found its doors wide open; the wardens, the jailors, and the soldiers on guard outside of the prison were all fast asleep. They reached the cell unmolested, and Rabbi Joshua stretched the corpse of his beloved teacher upon a litter that he had brought with him. But he could not remove the corpse alone, and so the stranger took hold and helped him. Whereupon Rabbi Joshua said: "Did you not tell me that you were a priest? You know that a priest is not permitted to become unclean by contact with a dead body!"

And the other answered: "I swear by your life, Rabbi Joshua, that a priest is permitted to lay hold of the dead body of a prince of the sacred lore."

They walked the entire night, until they came to Antipras. There they proceeded uphill and down, and at last found a cleft in the mountain, in which they entombed the corpse. Then they closed up the cleft, and the stranger said: "Happy art thou, Rabbi Akiba; thy pure soul has entered upon eternal life and thy spotless body will rest in security here, until the day will come

when God will open the graves and resurrect the bodies of the dead!"<sup>1</sup>

At the report of Rabbi Akiba's death, terror and despair overcame the remnant of Israel. The light of Israel seemed extinguished, the sources of wisdom dried up. Rabbi Tarphon, Rabbi Chananiah ben Teradion, and Rabbi Chuzpith were successively seized and executed. Virtually all the well-tested sages of Israel had given up the ghost, and the younger ones had not yet received their ordination. When Moses, at God's bidding, appointed Joshua his successor, he laid his hands upon the head of the younger man; in the same way, the later sages always consecrated their disciples and gave them, thereby, the right to teach and to expound. This is what is known as ordination (*Semichah*).

At the time of the persecutions of Hadrian, ordination had been strictly forbidden by the Roman authorities. Teachers and pupils who were convicted of having performed this ceremony were sentenced to death, and even the city in which the ordination had taken place was to be destroyed. Thus it had resulted that Rabbi Akiba had ordained none of his pupils. Rabbi Judah ben Baba determined to risk his life and to ordain Rabbi Akiba's pupils—Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Simeon, Rabbi Jose, Rabbi Nehemiah, and Rabbi Eleasar ben Shamua. He chose a spot between two mountains, equidistant from the two large cities of Usha and Shepoream, and laid his hands in consecration upon the heads of these men. But someone had betrayed them. Scarcely had the ordination been completed when Roman horsemen were seen approaching in the distance.

<sup>1</sup> Midrash Shochar Tob to Proverbs IX.

"Hasten, my children," cried Rabbi Judah ben Baba, "hurry away and save your lives."

"But you, Rabbi?" asked the pupils.

"Save yourselves! You are the bearers of the future of Israel. I shall attempt to delay our enemies. Let them cool their passion upon me!"

The disciples escaped, while the master calmly awaited the oppressors, who did as he had expected. They ran him through with their lances, and were contented with their one victim, so that they did not follow the fugitives.<sup>1</sup>

"The sun rises after it has set" (Ecclesiastes I, 5). On the very same Day of Atonement on which the sun of Rabbi Akiba had set for the inhabitants of earth, a child was born whose gleaming light was to irradiate the world.

The young son of Rabban Gamaliel, who, as was related above, escaped the massacre on the occasion of the destruction of Bethar, had grown up during the course of all these later events and had taken a wife. On the day of Rabbi Akiba's death, a son had been born to Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel, whom he called Judah.<sup>1</sup> Since Rabban Simeon, who had been elevated by the sages to the dignity of prince, had his son circumcised, he was accused before the governor.

In the meantime, Emperor Hadrian had been attacked by a hideous disease. His sufferings were so severe and his death-agony so terrible that he became the horror of all his surroundings. As the physicians had given him up, he vainly sought aid from astrologers and

<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin 14a.

<sup>1</sup> Kidushin 72b.

soothsayers. Finally, he entreated one of his own servants to release him from his misery by the sword or by poison. Fearful qualms of conscience visited him during his protracted illness, until, at last, he succumbed. He died on the tenth of July of the year 138 C. E.

During Hadrian's illness, his adopted son, Titus Aurelius Antoninus, acted as regent, and Tinius Rufus did not venture to sentence the prince of Israel to death, as he feared the clemency of the new Emperor. Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel was ordered to Rome, to defend himself there, before the throne of the Emperor, against the accusation of having transgressed the edicts of Hadrian. When he arrived in Rome, Hadrian had died and Titus Aurelius Antoninus, a man mature in years, of oft-tested capacities, and mild by nature—history has bestowed upon him the epithet "Pius," that is to say, "the Devout"—had ascended the throne. It so happened that, at this time, the Emperor's daughter lay violently ill, and Rabban Simeon succeeded in healing her. He gained thereby the favor of the Emperor, who was persuaded to revoke the edicts of Hadrian and to permit the still unburied corpses of those who had been slain at the destruction of Bethar to be interred.

When Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel brought back these joyous tidings to his native land, peace and security entered the hearts of the remnant of Israel. Hitherto the grace after meals had consisted of only three benedictions; in undying memory of this happy event, a fourth benediction was added, which runs:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, our mighty Father, our King, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Moulder, our Holy One, the Holy One of Jacob, our Shepherd, the Shepherd of Israel, the King

who is good and does good for all each day. He has vouchsafed kindness unto us, he vouchsafes kindness unto us now, and will continue to vouchsafe kindness unto us; He has rewarded us, He rewards us, and He will reward us for all times to come, with His favor, His love, His mercy, for freedom, deliverance, happiness, blessing, succour, consolation, support, care, grace, life, and peace; He will never permit us to lack anything that is good."

Tinius Rufus fruitlessly endeavored to nullify the Emperor's noble-hearted decisions, but was deposed from office for his pains, and finally took his own life.

Emperor Antoninus Pius had no son; he adopted Marcus Aurelius Verus, the son of that Lucius Aurelius Verus whom Hadrian had designated as his successor, but who had died before his royal patron. Marcus Aurelius Verus assumed the surname Antoninus, in honor of his foster-father. He was the one who formed an intimate friendship with Rabbi Judah the Holy, the son and successor of Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel. Israel now enjoyed a period of happiness, which Rabbi Judah employed for writing down the oral tradition. The Mishna of Rabbi Akiba, as his disciple, Rabbi Meir, had received it, was made the basis of the six orders of the Mishna compiled by the holy Rabbi Judah.

Thus Rabbi Akiba lives on in our midst. We are all his pupils. May his example inspire us to stake all our energies for the preservation of the Divine teachings, to live and to die for them, and through them to attain to immortal bliss!

Rabbi Akiba lived through the most crucial epochs in Jewish history, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the downfall of Bethar at the hands of Hadrian;

he experienced the bitterest disillusionment when the "son of the star" (Bar Kochba) became the "son of deception" (Bar Kesiba). He beheld the misery of his people as they writhed under the lash of Divine wrath; nevertheless, he did not once despair of the future of Israel, nor of the rebirth of his people, the source of whose life is, and will forever remain, the Torah. When the many thousands of his scholars were snatched away by death, he sought new pupils, despite his old age, and these few men became the leaders of Israel.

A nation that has such models need not despair. It cannot perish; after every era of humiliation and defeat, it will struggle up again to the light, put forth new blossoms, and produce fruits of blessing to it and to all mankind.

THE END.

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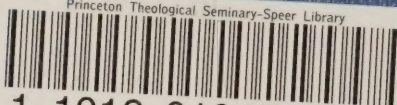
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